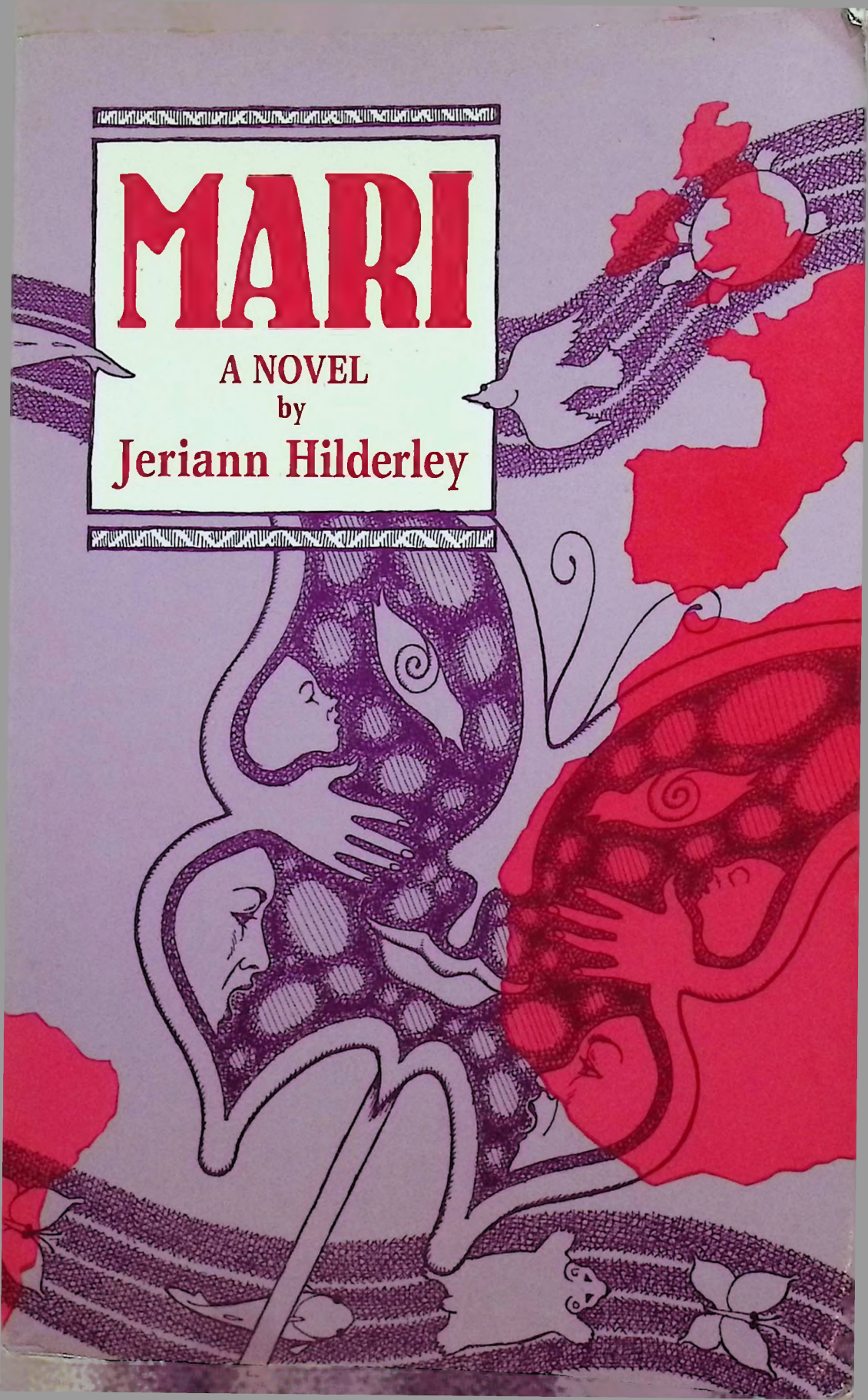
MARI

A NOVEL

by

Jeriann Hilderley



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* * *

I could ease into our story slowly, first draw her portrait with a delicate pen. Or I could imitate the rumbling sounds of the earthquake that jostled Mexico City yesterday where Mari is now, on her way back to Argentina—her homeland. I can't condense her into a short romance, paste her against a backdrop of oceans and large cities. How will I organize events, embraces? Spell out this essential stuff of my being? Nouns don't seem to name what we had and verbs can only suggest. I know my body will have been scrubbed hundreds of times before I can make our story shine as ivory clean as the bone amulet that shone on her neck.

* * *

MIRROR

When Mari and I first met, I loved the way we talked with our bodies as if they were our common language. I only knew a few simple Spanish phrases from grade school and she said English was far away from her that night. So with terrible faces and sounds she acted out her job for the past several months, stamping out metal toys in a Queens factory. I accompanied her with grunts and grins, then I mimed my own occupations—word processing and playing music. After that we laughed and drank a lot of wine.

Then at our next meeting, the night we sat in front of the fire, I asked her to stay with me for a while. How was I to know what I was asking?

Three times she entered my life as boldly as a mountain confronts the sky. The leaves were always changing color when she came. Three times she left, irrevocably like setting suns—once to Europe, once home to see her family, and now to her homeland, Argentina, perhaps forever. My very bones are marked.

Much of our time together was spent here in my small studio on lower Fifth Avenue. I was stationary like a stage set; she was mobile in her entrances and exits. She loved to sit where I'm sitting now, here in my favorite chair, a white wicker with blue velvet cushions. It held us both many times. I remember all the fires we watched, the sparks that skipped towards us across the 'rainbow hearth.' She called it that because all the tiles are different colors.

There, in the darkest corner of the room, the solid old piano she fingered timidly stands as permanently as an oak tree or a monument in a New England village. No one understands how it could have been carried up five flights of rickety wooden steps. Behind me is the couch, our couch, which opened up so luxuriously for us with a flirtatious sound all those nights. And in that corner stands the desk we shared. She propped up the narrow mirror on it so that we could see ourselves writing. I can see my face looking back from it now; my expression is intent, puzzled. That mirror will no longer hold her comic faces bent on keeping me enthralled with her. Those were her first faces in that mirror; later they were replaced by more somber ones.

Above me hang two huge masks I made years ago for the street theater. One is the face of the sun, the other the moon's face. Mari said we didn't need any lamps in this room. The masks lit us up as we plucked and beat and strummed on all the instruments I've collected. When we got tired of playing we fell into our blue chair and shared favorite passages from the books we were reading.

I watch a flyer for a women's concert slip from the wall and slide along the floor near me. I'm sure that Mari can hear my thoughts. Even in absence, she is strangely present.

My eyes find the brightest corner of the room. Some sun miraculously finds its way in here through the small skylight window. This is the kitchen area, where she hung comfrey up to dry. I'll make myself a cup of tea later. I will sit at the desk or at the table where we must have shared more than three hundred meals. I could easily map out a route of our love by tracing the nicks and scratches we made in the soft wood.

Mari wanted me to take down the satin curtain and put up a real door for the bathroom. Didn't she know how often I watched her silhouette dance on the curtain, as she luxuriated in that hot belly of a bathtub with its great lion's paws?

J.P. Morgan's servants once lived in this room on the top floor of this converted townhouse. They had names. I wonder how many people were cramped and for how many years in this fifteen-by-twenty-foot room? I found a set of rusted skeleton

keys that had been wedged behind the ancient radiator. How many decades were they there? They fell by my feet, like a plea from the past, one frozen day last winter as I tinkered with the valves to keep the radiator from sputtering. I hung them over the fireplace for good luck. Sometimes I sense presences hovering over me while I'm lying in my bed at night. There is something haunting about those ancient keys. But it is the key to my unsettled memories of Mari that I'm searching for.

Though we worked out some kind of peace between us when she left this last time, the fact that I don't expect to see her again has suddenly struck me harshly. I am both senseless and opened like a terrible wound. All the tumultuous yearnings she exposed in me have erupted once more. Now I feel that perhaps the words *lovers* and *friends* weren't made for us—our essential languages were too different. Rather, the primal utterances that fell between these words, controlled us, spoke us.

* * *

In a dream I watch her fall from the sixth floor and land flat on her back, face up and still breathing but badly hurt. I implore firemen, police, friends, and neighbors to help me care for her. But no one stops to listen, and only through a great expenditure of effort am I able to approach her. She has landed barely alive, on grass but inches away from concrete and the lethal spikes of a metal fence. As I kneel by her, not knowing whether to touch her or let her be, I wake up in a sweat to the sound of a phone.

"Did you hear yet from Mari?" Sarah Schoen, one of Mari's fans, is speaking. "There was an earthquake in Mexico City yesterday. Eight point nine on the scale. Isn't that where she is now?"

* * *

I remember all the articles I read in the *Times* when she left me the second time, the time she returned to her family, her country, to continue her work as a political and visionary poet. I was afraid for her then. Literary magazines shut down. Whole groups of activists murdered or vanished. People seized off the streets on their way to work or home, never to be seen again.

These stories kept her constantly in my mind. I'm still not sure whether she was among those hiding in the basement of a modest home in the suburbs while the military, crouching behind carefully pruned bushes, picked them off like so many wooden ducks. Was she there in the tenth floor apartment in downtown Buenos Aires when a death squad kidnapped the friends and relatives of the editor who advocated human rights? And where was she the night several guerrillas in their thirties—her age—jumped to their deaths from an abandoned warehouse rather than be murdered by a spray of bullets? Was she really safe on a tiny island miles from the city, with her five dogs and a compañera, surrounded by poor families who imagined exotic, peaceful planets?

* * *

Mari rushes up eighty-eight worn, wooden steps coming to see me. I watch her from the flaked railing outside my studio on the top floor. She embraces a guitar and a bouquet of colorful birds; no, they are flowers fluttering into my arms. Petals of tulips, narcissi, irises, daffodils caress our noses and lips. Her gift warms me. There is no heat in the building, this first time she has come to my place, October 27, 1974.

"How happy makes me to be here," she says. "I come when you need me, don't I?" There is nothing to say; she has spoken the truth.

I find the perfect container, the cut crystal vase on the window ledge. As I fill it with water and the flowers, tiny rainbows dance in the vase, in the flowers, on the walls of my small studio. What a fine feeling! These flowers, these delicate shapes woven in air, are so unlike the expected offerings from eager young men. These wild shapes seem to be metamorphoses from her lively imagination, solidified briefly for our pleasure.

Would she like a fire?

"Yes," she says, "I will watch the flames dance to my music." Soon I am swaying with the lush sounds of Torcaza, her guitar.

"You would like my peoples, my land, Judith," she assures me over and over. "My green ocean, my Pampa, is the beautiful.

The white horses, they play leap over with the clouds. And the butterfleas take long rides on the backs of tortugas."

The way she speaks English is so dear.

"What you say, tourtles? And my river, the Parana, she moves slow like a great dragon. She remind my peoples of our power to get reed of the norteamericano business mens. Wowse!"

I watch her face being sculpted by lights and shadows, appearing more animal than woman, familiar yet extraordinary. Her bold, open look excites me. She is not afraid to receive others. I feel I could adore her.

Someone might say her chin is too small. Another would laugh at her wide cheeks. She says her nose is too short, like her mother's; her legs are too long, like her father's. I think she is beautiful.

I am awed by her large breasts settling into her chest. I think of sand dunes settling into the sea. I put my hand on her shoulder, but she does not respond. She has eased into a quiet, deep place.

Suddenly sparks fly wildly about us in all directions. One just misses her bare foot. I crush the small ember with my thumb, hoping to impress her.

"It is the quasars which make to me, how do you says it, fascinacion?" Her eyes are focused on the ceiling.

"That's it!" I respond enthusiastically as if she has supplied the missing piece to a puzzle. "We use the same word, fascination. Maybe I can learn Spanish from you, Mari. But what are quasars?"

"The quasars are the black woholes in the sky which are the center of the universe." She smiles knowingly. "There, all that is goes to meet all that isn't."

"I love the way you make holes into woholes, but your quasars are a bit abstract."

"Look them up in your dictionary," she challenges.

I do.

"Here it is, Mari." My voice trembles as I read. "It says, *Quasar—astronomy, a quasi-stellar object, a black hole, an accumu-*

lation of matter so dense that gravity prevents the escape of light and would squeeze the infalling material sufficiently to release vast amounts of energy." Is she flirting with me through her mysterious, distant objects—super luminous objects that move faster than light—lying near the fringes of the observable universe, with vast energy productions almost impossible to explain?

"These are energy sources of great magnitude," she continues. "They are wildly spinning accumulations of the matter; they make chain reactions."

No doubt about it; the way to Mari is strewn with quasars not flowers. I wonder if she relates to something as mundane as a back rub.

"Entire stars fall into these black woholes." She beams. I reach across a galaxy and begin to rub her shoulders, her backbone.

"A billion times more massive than our sun...." There is a great indentation in her spine above her buttocks. I move into it gingerly.

"You have found it," she shouts. "My quasar!"

"Mari, you must do exercises to straighten your back."

"No, no. I like my black wohole. I will keep her," she says.

* * *

Perhaps I can salvage parts of her from the many photographs and letters I have. Many of her thoughts are shut up in the cardboard box underneath my desk. Did I really sleep next to her only a week ago?

Her letters often came weeks after they were written. We never worked out a system for knowing which ones did not make it through the tight grip of the censors. Twice we were able to smuggle tapes across the distance that divided us, a distance that has seemed as unknowable as that bridging life and death. Yet it was always a hit-and-miss process. No plans. No anniversaries. No repetitions. No security. Words we spoke or wrote down one day were lost in the wind the next. So, when we were actually together, we tried as best we could to stay in the present. Looking backwards or forwards was perilous.

Argentina — at the house of my Mama and Papa

Querida Judith,

Judith, did you receive my letters? I don't know nothing of you yet but I listen you always when the day will come.

Judith, going through time. I don't know where I am. If in the childhood or in the teens or here in the edge of the struggle or there now kissing you in some beautiful oldness with you inside me forever.

I'm spreading joy among this landscape of flesh and memory.

Judith, to tell you about my family, about the alamo tree, about the spiritual aura of my father and about the strength of my mother and the beginning of our hard friendship. About the fresh eyes and the torments of my sister. About my old cat and the small birds and the wind of the Pampas shattering the giant grass and all the terror and all the love you will feel only if you could come to my land.

People come to see me all the time and we drink mate from morning to night. They come to see the strange star, the wonderful foreign woman. And they go back happy because they found me like them, talking or silent or smiling or eating empanadas, with the mate most of the time in my hand.

I feel to grow inside me infinite poems and stories. I stay looking a lot the oldest people of my town, the oldest corners and the doves we call torcazas sadly singing under the pines.

How are the robins and the owl over the maple tree? Tell me about you. Tell me about your family. Tell me about your people and your land that is also mine more and more while I fall into love by this people and this place.

And now I'm a voice that conceals, and now I'm a voice that speak about all you.

I will stay here until September 11. After I go back to Buenos Aires because I have a place for me now. I'm moving to a small and light room one hour away of the downtown, a quiet sector. I payed a month and I will see how I will pay the next. I'm doing some little job here and there.

A magazine bought me yesterday two chronicles, one about Chicago and one about the factory in Queens.

It's so hard to find job and house here, but nevertheless I believe that would be important and visionaire for you to know this land, to spend some time here. But be careful. You probably can't to get job here.

I am looking for women to talk to within a feminist awareness in the class struggle context.

I dreamed wit you last night again. I was crying so long inside the dream because inside the dream I was losing you. I love you so much and so hard.

Mari

I am looking again at letters and photographs Mari gave me. No one would guess that I stored them away in the Gilbey's Gin carton. I filed the photos in chronological order so I could study how she changed and grew, even before I knew her. Maybe I knew that someday I would use them to make sense of her, of us. Some of the pictures she mailed to me, so I could see how she looked in strange, new places. Others, she just left behind with the rest of the paraphernalia she couldn't afford to take along. I'll sort them out on the table again. This time I'll arrange them in a circle. I'll light a candle too, and watch Mari quiver with life.

Here is definite proof that she was real, human; she was not an alien. But even when I show these pictures to my friends, I don't tell them how much she means to me. Maybe because I don't yet know myself. I won't know until I've worked her out in my mind with words. In a way, these shiny images are more real to me than the person who has come and gone so many times. They are what I can touch, hold, look upon. They are Mari.

Mari, in this one it looks like the devil has been scrubbed out of you. Your skin is so glossy, like wax. A spot of light splashes on your face and on the wall behind you. You're posed for a portrait. I don't feel you here. Your head looks like a ripe fruit that you're holding gingerly in your hands. Isn't there a monkey-on-a-stick or a bright balloon to make you smile? The photographer could have told you to say *Chica* or *Ché*. Where is your Papa, mi

pájarita? He could make you giggle.

I imagine Mari is mad at her mother. She wanted to wear the old leather vest that used to be Uncle Alberto's. But her mother buttoned her into this white silk blouse, enhanced by a delicate chain and gold cross. A white satin ribbon pulls her hair back tightly. Too tightly! Mari is held prisoner of her mother's desires and ardent faith.

Mari told me her mother would slap her and shout, "*Diablesa!*" whenever she did not want to help with the chores. "*Diablesa!*" when she left her little sister alone and sister fell off a chair or into the mud. Mama had no patience with the eldest daughter who preferred chasing *las tortugas* and singing rambling songs to baking bread and mending *las blusas.*

During her girlhood, Mari absorbed her mother's frustrations and self-hatred in a climate ruled by the fathers. Not until years later, when she left her parents' house, did she begin to stretch into her true shape. Then for the first time she enjoyed glancing at her image in a mirror. She told me about a ceremony she did in her twenties to bury the sad child I see in this photograph, dressed in the crisp silk *blusa.*

But Mari, when did the *consejo de ensenañza* pressure your parents into placing you in the mental hospital? Why did they want to tranquilize you and force you to be other than what you were? Surely not at puberty, not when your menstrual blood had just begun to flow? You told me, but I've forgotten. I guess I could not take knowing that an open and sensual child was confined and mutilated with deadening drugs. I remember you told me how threatening your visions were to others. Only a fierce sense of self-preservation helped you escape from this incarceration so that you could live by your imagination.

I hold now the photo of Mari taken at the age of twenty-one, the year she walks bravely away from the small stone house of her parents, turns her back on the village of her childhood. She will not return for many years. What gave her the courage when so many of us are kept prisoners of our families?

How tall she looks, planted firmly against a white sky. She stands on those hard, stone steps constructing a blueprint which

will lead her through fifteen countries in the next several years. This curious woman-boy wears boots made from the skin of an animal she had once cared for. Indian myths tell her that they now possess magical powers.

Her small slender hands thrust defiantly into the pockets of jeans. Mama will no longer tell her what to wear. She feels for the tiny picture of an Amazon princess she had hidden there. She finds it and I hear an impassioned cry. "I want to be what I can be! I want to be me!" Once again, an old fantasy I keep trying to hide in a corner of my heart slips away with these words. Mari doesn't exist to serve my needs either. She is sipping maté far away someplace in a land I do not know.

I need my drum, the one by the piano, the one I made a year ago. I wish she were here to play it with me. I used a small barrel I found on 22nd Street when I was out gathering scraps of wood for my fireplace. For the skins I used the thin skins of the Indian drum, the caja chayera that Mari had sent me after she returned home.

When I pick up this fragile instrument I remember how the original one collapsed. I placed it too near the fire one night hoping to tighten the skin. The broken instrument haunted me for weeks until I realized I could make another using the same parts.

I inserted small wooden pegs behind the secured straps that fit against the barrel, pegs that could be pulled downward to tighten the skin.

I love this drum. Holding it fills me with peace. It sounds as good to me now as it did when I first played it two and a half years ago. My fingers are so eager to beat. I want to find the rhythm used by the Indian women to accompany their *bagualas*, wailing chants mourning the loss of their land.

I can't bear the photos on the table any longer. But pictures of Mari are cascading in my mind. I close my eyes. Follow her. Stalk her into the past. See her wander through the places she has shown me on the map. Cordoba, Santiago, San Miuel, San Salvador, Mendoza are small cities she explored in Argentina. Peasants in Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Oruro, La Paz in Bolivia see her small, solid woman's body edge along the rough roads.

Young Chilean revolutionaries in Valparaiso, La Serena, Antofagasta, Arica hear her lush-voiced poems, her primal weapons. I watch her move northward again through the Indian villages where she learns the ancient rites of Peru. I imagine her as protagonist in an ecstatic ritual.

The names of other cities Mari knew come to mind. Arequipa, Pisco, Lima, Huanuco, Iquitos, Trujillo, Chiclayo, Piera. I'll say the names again. I love their sounds. See how whole towns fall off the tip of my tongue with ease? Towns I once did not know existed?

In Quayaquil and Quito of Ecuador and on the Island of Isabella, she dreams repeatedly that Michaelangelo's David walks ahead of her with a grenade in his hand. The dream both terrifies and excites her. With sores on her feet she trods into Colombia, scanning the hungry faces in Pasto, Cali, Bogota. Along the coast near Barranquilla and the Island of San Andres, she plays in the reedy grasses and sings with birds I've only seen in National Geographic. By way of Honduras and Guatemala she enters Mexico.

When I see her in this picture, resting on the bed of a sleazy hotel room, my skin prickles. But she looks content just to have a roof over her head. The strained atmosphere of childhood is giving way to more natural moods. She is finding a home in her body, settling in with her own possibilities.

Friends encouraged Mari to seek publication and soon small publishing houses issued her delicate books in modest editions. Yesterday, when I picked one up, I imagined I heard tiny explosions. Were they seeds bursting with life? Or grenades destroying it?

When this work was done she moved on to caress the worn stones of Aztec temples, to gamble at Acapulco, to flirt with drugs at Veracruz. She shared beds and adventures with other wanderers. All manner of people were attracted to her and she liked them too, for they were helping her to like herself.

Mari, take your hands out of your pockets. Officials are waiting to examine your *pasaporte*, the same *pasaporte* I now hold in

my hand. You are about to first enter my country at Houston, Texas.

Mari is distracted, distraught. But the officials are satisfied. They push her on with sharp, impatient words. "Okay, next," snaps her into the moment and she hitches her possessions to her back, the worn orange backpack and the woven shoulder bag with writings, books, and the last letters from Margarita. She moves on but her limbs are sluggish, unfeeling.

News of Margarita's death reached her only that morning, though it had happened months before. She had killed herself and was found clutching a small cloth animal Mari had given her as symbol of their undying friendship. Their connection as lovers had been brief. Margarita's books stood as bold examples in a land where the voices of other women were being smothered. They had inspired and guided Mari's movements from one landscape to another. Now she would have to enter my country feeling a primal loss, like the loss of a limb. Breathe deeply, Sweetheart. You will love again.

She makes her way to the Chicanas in Texas, in California, in New Mexico. She picks fruit and exchanges stories in a lively mixture of tongues. Phrases leap passionately from other lips to hers and slowly she makes them her own.

Oh, Love, la fortuna did not forecast the ecstasy I would find along the electric back of America. La bruja did not tell me that this planet is a beast stretching under its fur of leaves. Wake up, Me! It is the end of childhood, the beginning of road. Mari wrote that.

The candle wick sputters. I am alone in my room. I am not with Mari. I don't know where Mari is.

* * *

My mirror is oval, framed in soft silver. The handle is wood and was made to be held. It invites use. Others' mirrors might be set in carved ivory or bone with handles of gold leaf or mosaic, passionate gifts of new lovers. I can imagine many breathtaking rituals of auto-seduction, but I can only describe my own accurately.

I need darkness to feel safe. I need a small source of light so I can focus my attention. I need warmth so I can relax before my small mirror, my window into myself. I need a comfortable bed, an elegant cloth, so that when I am filled with the sight of me, I can lie back and wrap myself in pleasure.

Look at my vagina! No one has inner lips like mine. No one else carries such a butterfly between her thighs. I laugh with shyness, with joy. The tips of my fingers trace their scalloped edges. The velveteen softness always surprises me. Their responsiveness to my touch still amazes me. Arousal stimulates a fantasy.

I am handing out brightly colored speculums to passersby on the steps of the New York Public Library. A crowd quickly surrounds me. Both stone lions turn to me and nod, encouraging me to speak.

"My friends, do you realize that at this very moment thousands of women are gazing into their own vaginas for the very first time?"

Questioning faces are fixed upon me. I must go on.

"The vagina, extraordinary organ of sensuality and perceptiveness, is the earth's household from which all life emanates. This organ must be honored and obeyed."

A young girl, her punk hair rising proudly from a hardened face, pushes towards me. A bent, elderly woman beams her eyes upwards into mine. Hispanic women directly to my left unfold a giant, purple flag. Sewn in large silk letters of brilliant colors are the words, "Vagina Omniba, E Pluriba Una." I wave at them knowingly and they wave back.

"The key to our spiritual powers is our own sexual organ," I say to the crowd, now pulsing with excitement. "Your womanhood will be made holy, yes wholly manifest. Heed the source of your woman power." The word, vagina, *is on everyone's lips.*

Now music accompanies my daring delivery. Harps join the flutes. Bells and melodious trumpets follow. The two lions leap from their podiums and frolic with the crowd.

Many women are holding up varied sizes and shapes of drums for me to see. They need my approval. Soon an organic

beat blends with the rich sounds of the other instruments. "Vagina Omniba," becomes a penetrating chant. I am floating on the vibrant energy now released. The lions and the chant fade into the weight of my hand on my sex.

My left hand inches towards my opening. My right hand still grasps my small mirror. My clitoris has slipped behind the sheath, like a reluctant lover. I pursue, teasing the skin back until it appears proudly, yet vulnerable, budlike. I feel both relaxed and poised.

The territory I want to cover is vast, geographical. Crests, valleys, plains, rivers present themselves to my hands. I am overwhelmed by sensation. Still, I resist orgasm and explore yet another spot wanting my caress. Hot waves pulse from my center, I can no longer hold back. I succumb into orgasm and then another and yet another.

Why do I need a lover when I can give myself pleasure, I wonder? Primal sounds and the soft cloth hold me. Then the feel of Mari's tongue pressing on my clitoris overtakes all other sensation. And I begin to ache for her terribly. The gnawing awareness of her absence has been lessened only momentarily.

* * *

"And when one is alone, can one simply love oneself? I try to do that, you see. When you're alone, Mari, do you ever make love to yourself? Do you masturbate? Do you give yourself sexual pleasure?"

I feel her body tighten beneath me.

"I cannot to give myself pleasure, Judith. For me the sexual love is the wonderment expression between two people."

"Have you ever tried it?"

"I can reach down there and touch the vagina. That's not hard. I know where she is. I know so well the little flash button which in the passionate embrace seems like the totality of the sensual feeling."

"I'm talking about really being your own lover sometimes. I think it cuts down on this longing we all get into for the one and only. Loving the feel of your own hands, exploring every part and texture of one's own sexuality. And letting your mind move

with whatever fantasy you need to get the juices going. It can be quite a gas."

She sits up so she can look at me straight on. "I think there is something like repugnance for me in the sexual onanism. It is like a blasphemy against the act of coupling in the sexual-spiritual embrace of different, attracting persons from which for me all love is born."

"Mari, you know, that sounds very much like a heterosexual notion—where each person owes their wholeness to the fact of the other, instead of to the fact of themself. I know what you mean about the power of two people being attracted to each other and expressing that attraction through sexual love. But to think that's the only way to be sexual can be destructive to us. After all, we don't always have somebody else to make love with. But we always do have our bodies which need to be touched and need release. And then when we do have somebody to make love with, we're always expecting the other person to act in a way that complements our need of them. Why not be whole unto ourselves? Then everything else is a piece of cake. But give ourselves what we need first."

"I know a lot of women here think like that, Judith. But for me it doesn't work. I can't to arouse myself in that way. For me the beauty of the life is the mysterious interaction that occurs between the two people and I don't want anything to take that from me."

"I don't think the one pleasure has to take from the mystery of coupling—of joining, as you call it. But I think self-love and being able to give oneself pleasure can be compatible with loving, touching someone else. Don't you think so, Mari?" That was when Mari began to weep.

* * *

Here, this photo is the one I cherish most. We are sitting together on the roof above this studio—the roof where Mari once threatened to leap away from me forever because I had taken another lover.

I always held her especially close when someone took our picture, as if I could ward off destiny. I see how she holds me

close too, protectively. She's keeping menacing presences away.

I feel her eyes on me now, burning into my mind like two candle flames. They are accusing me: "You can't pave a smooth road for me even now, Judith," they seem to say. "Stop trying to explain me. You give me qualities that are your own."

* * *

Oh Mari, love, I admit there will be holes in this story, not like the intense woholes of your imagination, but like the tender punctures in your ear lobes. Do you remember how I cleaned and put tiny crystals in them? These jeweled spaces will be for you.

Can I take this rush of you? Static images have become a movie:

There she is lying on that cheap pad. Greasy fingerprints and wilting wallpaper surround her. How can she bear it? Some benevolent spirit must protect her. Can I watch her fucking a Viet Nam vet missing a leg?

Now she's listening to that too-friendly college professor espousing on the genius of Borges. He should be listening to her. Her sensuality is exploding.

Look! Off she gallops across a great desert, sagebrush catching in her capa. This time a camel-smoking cowboy pursues her. The bees are after her flower.

I will photograph her on carpets of alfalfa, wheat. I want to see her in a cornfield. The ripened tassels are exactly the color of her hair. She will look good hugging trees, a maple, an oak, a birch. She loved the smell of pine.

Each new name, new texture, new shape thrilled her. She was always a child, learning. But the circles of red paint stroked on the elm trees made her cry. She knew a terrible blight moved across the terrain ahead of her. She had a sixth sense for danger.

I never took her picture when she danced. She was like gravity, pulling everyone's eyes towards her. She loved *Muddy Waters* and *Jefferson Airplane*. She knew more about the sixties

groups than I did. The *Grateful Dead* found their way into her dorm when she was in college. She loved our country music too.

Where is the shot I took of her with Torcaza, her guitar? Did she take that with her?

This is the last picture, Mari with a puertorricueña child in the subway. Everyone wanted to take her picture. Come Mari, through the fume-filled tunnels, the searing screeches. Come to me.

Soon I'll hear her climbing the stairs; she'll be with me again in no time. I'll blow out the candle and we can rest together in the darkness. I'll try to tell her a funny story, though I'm not very good at it. "Do you know, mi hermana, how the *Rock Way Rollers* from Scotland came to be named after a small town in Ohio, my home state?" She always loved stories about home towns. "It all began when the boys in the rock band put a map of the world on the wall. They blindfolded the one who played the sax, turned him around and around and told him to stick the pin anywhere in the map. The place pierced by that pin would name their group. And do you know, Mari, the pin went straight into Rock Way, Ohio, 30 miles from my house in Centerville."

I would want to tell her more about my town. How the Main Street was abandoned for the shopping centers. How there are no trees now to shade you from the sun when you shop. But she'd be sound asleep. My stories always put her to sleep.

* * *

Buenos Aires, Diciembre

Pirujita, te quiero. I draw my love for you all over the air of the pampas. Your eyes, and the shape of your head still on my breast make me feel strong and tender and alive. Together we blossom.

Let us to grow the rainbow, the wind among the trees, the bread, the wine, the song, the poems, the little noices of our bodies hugging each other under the sun of midnight.

Let us to be two to be infinite beings but also to be just one deep ONE until the end of the times.

I'm trying to control myself a lot, emotionally because I want the madness faraway of me. Judith, many things are enough okay. Don't be worry for me. I will work and will organize a little my life next months. I will come to be with me.

I sent you my caja chayera, the Indian drum from the north of my country. It was playing for me and for another people with so deep feeling. Women play the caja during the carnaval specially, singing strange songs named bagualas with high voices, full of sadness, full of nostalgia because they lost their land and their culture. They play stand up, holding with a hand the strap of leather and drumming with the stick with the other hand. We give this kind of objet only to a person we know will use it, will sing it with the true spirit. I know you will find our soul inside this drum.

A dove from the Pampas gave me her feather for you, for to fly into your body is the beauty of these days, my distant one. I think you during our summer with the icicles on your nose.

I'm doing a series of articles about the Rolling Stones. I remember the long nights with you listening them. Their terrible and so energetic music.

Why this? Why all this perfect natural harmony and between that you and me separate? And when we were together we were also separate for the swords as well as the tendernesses. And why if we chose each other between millions, if my eyes were looking you from the fern's age, why to be as far apart as one star from anither?

It's a terrible violence with me and with the Universe. I embrace you strong against my breasts.

Mari

* * *

Mari, did I ever tell you what it was like for me as a child, one of twins? Did I tell you that when I looked in the mirror over the bureau, the face I saw smiling back at me often was not mine; the frowning face in my childhood snapshots, the face that could have been mine, was not mine? Did I tell you that when I breathed at night my breaths were initiated, layered or echoed

by another's? Did I tell you that the first time I knew I was me and not her, not both of us, was when I fell and felt the sharp pain in my knee; I was the one crying, she was the one watching me cry.

I see a child, myself, huddled in a small bed, separated by a chasm of several feet from my twin sister. She is curled into herself in an identical small bed. Her steady breathing tells me she is sleeping soundly. She protects her thin body from the monsters who eat up twins. If they decide to tear one of us away from our mother, which one will it be? Which one is the real daughter? Which one the mirage? Which one wipes dust off the mirror? Which one is in the mirror being dusted? Every night I juggle these questions. Maybe we are monsters.

Mother never intimated that we were freaks. She never explained why Rusty Thompson, who babbled incoherently with fingers sticking in his ears, followed us to school each morning, crying, "Look, two! Two just alike. They must have been made by the same company." She saw him laugh and pee on our good shoes. She saw nice kids throw stones at us along with sharp, nasty words. She saw but kept silent.

She said, "Everyone knows me now as the mother of the twins."

She could have put us in the circus. We could have become skilled at rainmaking, at appearing and disappearing from all sides of the room at once. She could have strapped us together forever as grotesques and sold us for a tidy sum. But she was content to dress us alike until we were eighteen, then send us to different colleges where we gasped our first breath alone, sucking in our separateness for the first time.

My sister knew how to ward off the ghosts who hid in our twin bureau. She didn't give them the time of day. She knew how to yap at the macabre shadows drifting under our twin beds, then go to sleep. But I stayed awake to confront lurking presences. I stared at the patterns of lights and shadows washed across the ceiling by passing cars. Shapes and textures became frightening figures and words.

I would be brave and try to face my fears alone, without her. I

would make a prayer that would be heard beyond the light blue ceiling of our room. Praying, like feeling pain and later joy, could give me a freeing sense of my own selfness.

I would ask God how to help my parents get along better.

Should I say that mother yelled at father to take the garbage out? That he cussed her back? That they didn't kiss or hug each other? That he never bought her beautiful presents like Mr. McKinney bought for Mrs. McKinney? That I wasn't sure if they really liked each other?

Oh my sister, my sister-self, what turbulent worlds did you hide or silently try to remake as you clung to yourself beside me? As I took on our parents problems did you find your own ways to escape? I saw our twinship gradually being torn asunder by this lack of visible tender love between our parents. I was becoming our mother's mate and Meredith, my sister, our father's.

Because I was younger, though only by ten minutes, my mother saw me as 'the baby.' She reached through me back to herself— Constance, youngest of eleven. She coddled me, groping to love her own infant shadow-self.

My mother, little Constance, was an easy target for teasing. She ate up the strawberries she was supposed to bring home for supper. She preferred her fingers to silverware; there were always spots on her clothes. When she was sent to the garden to pick tomatoes and lettuce, she came home with pine cones and wild flowers. Yet, she lapped after her brothers and sisters all day, enduring their scoldings like a faithful puppy. Years later I could see how my aunts and uncles must have looked down on my mother with that mixture of fondness and disdain as they told me stories about their baby sister.

But Constance would surprise them all. She was eyeing the top of the family totem; she would climb her way out of her humble position.

She exchanged passivity for ambition. She would not marry laborers as her sisters had done. She would not be poor. She would marry a white collar and tie man—a lawyer, a doctor, a chemist. She would have a large house and three children that she could send to the best colleges. She would be the perfect

hostess for a successful husband. They would belong to exclusive clubs and attend the Episcopal church. She would be chairman of women's groups and he would play golf. Together, they would be pillars in their community.

Not all of her dreams came true. But being a strong-willed woman, she found a way to live with uncomfortable realities. She simply rearranged them in her mind as easily as she moved an arm chair from one end of the living room to the other to make a more acceptable, a more pleasing arrangement, one that others would like.

My early days were spent under my mother's hypnotic power. I was her puppet, lover, slave, chaperone, bodyguard, accomplice and avenger. My sister expressed bitterness about this passionate union she witnessed but did not experience. To pacify her, I stopped competing with her and stepped meekly into the shadows where I could see but not be seen. When we both ended up as finalists in the town's skating tournament, I wanted my sister to win. So she did. When we both competed for a scholarship to an acting camp, she came away with top honors. Then I convinced myself and others that I tried as hard as I could. Now I can say I had greater needs to contend with than winning. My grave, self-appointed caretaker position offset my own ego.

My darling sister did not take her betrayal by the other two women in the family lying down. She transformed our father into her shield and in the name of rules he would uphold, she knifed me deeply three times when my life choices were intolerable to her. She severed our connection each time, quickly and without remorse. I forgave her for those rejections, still believing that the kind of intense connection I shared with my mother must have felt like a terrible rejection to her. But now I wonder: Were the frowns I have seen in our childhood photos simply stating: "Why are you here too? I would like to be the only daughter!" Will we ever find a way to mend that terrible cleaving I feel but do not understand? Am I my sister's keeper?

When the monsters grew too large for me to handle and I stumbled in my appeals to God, I slipped out of my bed and

scurried to the bed of my mother. She took me in warmly. She needed me as I suffered with her well. I would try to tell her what was troubling me. For she was also my confessor.

How good it was to hold onto a real parent and snuggle my face into real flesh. Doubts about the effectiveness of prayers to the heavenly Father were ripening. His abstract image lifted like a foggy nightmare as I tried to time my own breathing with her longer and deeper breaths. "Mother, I'm very worried about something. I...I...I'm afraid to tell you."

"What is it, Judith? Tell me, little shadow baby."

"Doesn't father like to take the garbage out?"

"Your father works very hard. He's a good father to you kids."

"He never smiles at you."

"He doesn't drink. He doesn't gamble. He brings home his paycheck every week."

"You never smile at him. You never touch each other."

"You don't understand, Sweetheart."

"Why aren't you and father glad to be with each other? Why can't you be like other married people?" My voice, though less formal than it had been with God, sounded strange. It didn't sound like it belonged to me yet.

Mother remained silent so long I thought she must have fallen asleep.

"Ma? Ma?" I whined. "Did you hear me? Why can't you and father be more like married people? I mean, why do you have to have separate bedrooms?"

Finally she spoke. "Judith, there are many things you don't understand. My hands are tied. We have three children to provide for and your father is a good father. We work very hard for you kids. Believe you me. Now go to sleep. And it is not your concern." She turned on her side away from me.

Maybe the lack of a romantic glow in their relationship didn't bother her as much as it bothered me. Maybe I didn't have to protect her all of the time. And she was right. I didn't see how hard father worked at his job. I didn't appreciate then that he didn't drink or gamble. I didn't see how special he was in his own way. I didn't understand that his predilection for being

ornery was a habitual self-defense mechanism because he lacked the ability to assert his needs in a convivial manner. And I didn't know when I was young that he used a little room in the basement of his office building to putter in sometimes after work hours to invent clever little gadgets. I remember a little clock that every hour would jump up and down like a Jack-in-the-Box. Maybe he was making them for us, for his children. I don't know because mother made him throw them away in her periodic scourgings of disorder and dirt in the house. He never talked about it. I didn't see that I carry my father in me just as I carry my mother. I couldn't see him because he didn't seem to want to be there in the house with us. And he never held me or was tender. He was the ghost who hid under my bed. He was the father who didn't respond to my prayers.

It would take years of my own difficult experiences with love to learn to respect my parents in their tenacity and ability to accomplish a task they had set for themselves. It would take years for me to understand that this ability to stick to a certain goal, though it seemed constrictive and limited to me, was in fact one element of love that could inspire and serve me throughout my life and work. I could learn from some of their techniques though content and vision would differ.

The nights I slept with mother did not relieve me of my troubling concerns. She didn't say that though it was hard work to raise children, she and father loved each other very much. And her need to protect her choices—security, a home, three children—without demanding that magical ingredient, passionate and tender love, became the closet I had to escape from. I needed to feel that parents stayed together because they wanted to—not only for the sake of the children. I didn't know then that I would have to help create alternative environments where people not unlike my mother and father would have more choices. But I did know then that I hated the sinister expression, "My hands are tied," and the puzzling statement, "I've made my bed so now I'll sleep in it," uttered periodically by my mother.

That night I whispered goodnight to my mother again and again until at last I fell asleep. My small arms gripped her in

preparation for a possible encounter with a recurring dream: She wraps me in a stiff cloth, places me in a small crib as I sob uncontrollably. She lights a small fire near me, walks away and leaves me wailing all alone.

* * *

"In Zorra's sleep the galaxies were born." Mari's voice, muffled by the silvery, silk curtain separating bathroom from kitchen, enters me. She is reading from her work-in-progress.

"She imagines the millions of tiny hairs on all the pubescent pelvises on earth. She listens to the way the world moves. Motionless, she listens...." I feel my shoulders relaxing.

"Judith, come here and see the filamentas on my estomach," she interrupts herself. Though I don't know Spanish, I have no trouble understanding *filamentas* and *estomach*. I am instantly aware of a flush on my face, different from the heat I have been feeling from the crackling fire. I go to her.

She stands naked before the mirror, smiling and combing her hair. I move behind her and place my hands on her hips. I look at her face in the mirror. She feels what I feel. It does not take long for me to undress. Now we are both naked.

She lays the comb down on the sink, turns to me and takes both my hands. We sense the awesomeness of the moment. No words can describe the feeling well. I lead her through the silk curtain to the kitchen table. Shyness overcomes me and I drop her hands and turn away.

I should prepare the vegetables I have placed on the table for supper. But as she lowers herself to her hands and knees, the vegetables blur in front of me. Fire dances in the entire room.

Strong hands caress my thighs. A warm, wet organ, her tongue, moves insistently between my buttocks toward my throbbing clitoris. We are needy animals. Her head twists upwards and I spread my legs, my lips, for her convenience. I put my fingers into her mouth, touching the tongue which caresses my vagina. I slip to the floor and pull her to me. Her mouth is on mine. Her two eyes blur into one eye, the third eye in the middle of her forehead. Our passions match perfectly.

I remember that we didn't wash our hands before supper. We joke together and say the vegetables would be seasoned with our own scents. I think we eat in silence, each lost in her own wonderment at our passionate embrace, each questioning where this passion could lead us.

Buenos Aires en Julio
Querida Judith,

How is running your summer, Judith? How many fireflies and smiles? How many clouds making a shadow over your head?

What can I sing you? About people and about me or about the meteors falling each night inside my pupils with the sound of you? What? Because I adore you, I have not words for you. I have the misterious silence that is the music of love.

I have few friends here. The people with who I share this apartement, particularly a woman with who I have a tender friendship. And Fernando. I see him sometime and occasionaly other peoples. A little female cat came here one night, and she stayed here and was named Flora. It was cold and she cry and cry.

I have also some little green plants and a magnificent sun came up to shine our life three days ago. I was sick and kept miself in bed for several days. In the beginning of that Fernando gave me your last letter as beautiful as full of life towards me.

I pretend to forget **Zorra's Book** *now. Maybe if I can forget I will remember her and my book will become light and articulate. I'm reading and spending a lot of time with do nithing.*

Birds are singing from the eucalyptus trees, my beloved giants. And Argentina, painful mother is beginning give birth to herself again. Searching the road people is moving, slowly moving together.

Oh Judith. I also don't want to lose you, my love. I'm here and close to you mi companerita.

Mari

LESBIAN BOAT RIDE

The plum velvet skirt is still hanging in my closet, patiently waiting to be perked up a bit and taken out for another whirl. I wear it with a transparent blouse etched with flowers that I have pieced together from a spring dress I stopped wearing because it was too femme. I am toughening myself up and learning to do battle. Dresses would not do any longer. But the evening of the boat ride I feel like celebrating my body. It does bother me a little that I am one of the few women wearing a skirt, but I wanted soft material to caress me, not clasp me tightly. Others are dressed up in military uniforms, jump suits, carpenters' pants, jeans with the blue scrubbed out of them.

Five hundred of us come out that night for this was to be the big event of our season, an important ritual in our expanding history. Five hundred outrageous lesbians come together for a night of sailing on a chartered ship up the never-never land of the Hudson River to Bear Mountain, imagining the boat's magical disappearance at midnight so that we will never have to return again to a cement city filled with too many obtuse men.

We depend upon our combined powers to make something unexpected occur. Four hours can contain a ceremonial passage away from the institutions of the man and into the body of ourselves. An event no one can tabloid. Who knows what might happen? A storm might come up on the Jersey shore to help us. We might be stranded and have to set up camp with only our wits and jackets for cover. We have baskets of luscious fruits,

pungent cheeses and fierce desires. We have husky wines, piercing words, tender caresses and the need for adventures that aren't watered down. We want the real thing, real, earthy romance. More real than Moby Dick and Captain Ahab. More real than Jesus Christ and Judas Iscariot. More expressive of our natures. We aren't out to murder a whale or a man; we are out to discover ourselves and a world we believe in.

That night anything is possible. Everyone is excited. I am self conscious about my skirt but no one else seems to even notice it, except Hera and a guy on the boat crew. All that matters is that I make it aboard.

I am still aroused from the afternoon. Mari has moved in with me earlier that day and we have made love. Afterwards we watched a rose do a sweet little dance for us in its vase. We were high on each other.

* * *

Today I would not have left her for the pleasure of that other outing. I would have stayed with her to fully enjoy the delicious blending from a full encounter where both give, both receive. But I have planned this journey with my friends for weeks in advance, before I even knew Mari existed. All the tickets had been sold long before. And I am committed to creating a culture with those familiar to me. Besides, I am young and positive that all of New York City's lesbia will be aboard.

Mari said: "You need your sisters just like I need mine," and pushed me out the door.

I didn't want to see the moistness flooding her eyes. Yes, I confess that I never opened myself to her completely when I was with her. Only when she is on the other side of the world again do I really commit my heart to her. Only when I can not reach out and touch her can I say, "Mari, I am deeply in love with you," and voice my deepest need to know another woman and thus affirm my own true woman self.

I am being eased firmly towards the dance floor of the excursion boat. No one bothers to ask for my consent. All the hips, hands, buttocks, breasts going that way assume I want to go

there too. I am powerless to stop the momentum.

"Looks like you're going to be part of the action, Baby," I say, clinching my jaw and feeling rather pinched. "None of this standing on the sidelines and eyeing the girls tonight."

Occasionally a familiar shape slips by; the lips of Janice, the pointed ears of Doe, the lanky, friendly body of Justine, the heavy eyes of Lorraine, the solid frame of Violet. The familiar parts of women I have known swirl into the dancing bodies of strangers. Yet, all seem familiar beyond words. Familiar, I guess, because we are all cast from the same mold.

When I am nearly at the center of the dance area, I decide to claim a small parcel of floor by digging in with my polished, black, Frye boots hiding under my skirt. Everywhere I look I see bracelets and rings, buttons and caps dancing to the blasting music of a rock and roll singer. Wrapped in a silver snake of a dress, the singer balances on shockingly high heels.

Doesn't it matter to anyone here that she is singing a love song to a guy? Or does everyone just fasten on her lively, sensual body? I for one am tired of hearing *he* instead of *she* and tonight especially *he* scratches at my ear drum. This night is supposed to be for us.

My resistance to this hard-hitting, liquor drinking music is being threatened by the wonderful feel of body after body rubbing against me. Then someone grabs my shoulders.

"Hey, Bird! What are you doing standing there all alone? Come on. Let's dance."

Six feet of chunky woman beams down on me. I'm surprised Hera's so friendly—just last week she snubbed me at the Priestess Bar where she works as a bouncer. I don't think she trusts me. I'm less flamboyant about my lesbianism than she is. She's a hard-core political, practically organized the Rape Crisis Center in the Village by herself.

"Hera! You are stunning" I shout over the loud music.

"Do you like it? I rented it at ten bucks for the night." She winks as if I'm supposed to grasp some subtlety of meaning, but I don't.

She is dressed in full captain's regalia from hat to boots and

flashes with medals. Her straight, short hair clings to her face from sweat. She looks good. I'm inspired to place both my hands on her waist. Besides, if I don't I'll lose her.

She seems glad that I've reached out to her and responds by placing her large hands on my shoulders. I'm surprised, but she almost seems shy about looking into my eyes.

"Heard you play last week at the Teahouse, Bird," she winks again. "I was fascinated but I didn't get it. You know, you're kinda weird!"

Her comment puts heat in my cheeks. For the second time she calls me by the name I use when I give a concert. I would like to walk away from her but I am pinned against her. "Thanks for the compliment." I have to shout again because of the din.

She looks startled. What does she expect? A hound dog look?

"Do you know what weird means, Hera?" Of course she doesn't. The Super Dyke.

"It used to mean peculiar, strange," she says. "Did you invent a new meaning?"

"It might mean that to you, but not to me," I say, ignoring a sarcastic tone.

Better be careful. I'm walking on eggshells. I know very well that my manner stinks of college and middle class. Hera's smells of factories and workers. Mari has been raising my consciousness about the subtleties of class differences. She says sometimes I talk like I had caviar in my mouth. But I've been on unemployment, even on welfare. For all I know Hera has money in the bank which I never had. Maybe she even owns a car and maybe she went to college too.

The dance floor tilts and I feel slightly nauseated. Hera doesn't seem to be bothered at all by the rocking floor. Obviously, she wants to get my goat. She must think I am an easy tease. It's not so much what she says but the way she says it. I know her crowd has pegged me *mystical* which to them is a dirty word. They probably get a big laugh from my images of women flying into the center of the full moon. Well, I won't be put down by other people's ignorance and fear.

Suddenly Hera, who has been dancing with her eyes closed, gives me a direct look and flicks me round, almost half circle. What's going on here? I feel like I'm her hot potato.

Enormous hands come down again on my shoulders. I pull away and rock in front of her.

I'm shouting, "If you trace the etymology of weird, Hera, you'll find it comes from the root *wer*, related to the words wrist, ring, writhe, wreathe, and other words which suggest circular motion. Weird really means to bend and turn with the motion of the earth. And when you move in *natural* rhythms," I emphasize the word *natural,* "you can control your own fate because you're connected to your own powers. You are a wise woman, a witch. Get it? That's what weird means to me."

I feel proud of myself. I have not let her intimidate me.

She whistles through her teeth, still pumping in beat to the music."Sure it means all that, kid? I never said you weren't creative, imaginative, brilliant and even sexy though you try to hide it."

I don't know what to think of her. I hope she doesn't wink at me again. I don't share any secrets with her.

"I just said you were weird, meaning a bit vague. You work with metaphors and I work with facts, hard facts. Women in trouble. How come you're so defensive, baby?"

"Listen, Hera, I respect your work." Why don't I remind her that baby is a sexist word when applied to a woman? "I just want you to see the importance of what I do too."

"Take it easy, honey."

"Has anyone ever said you were weird before? I bet your sister, your brother, someone got your goat by calling you weird."

A small, energetic woman jabs me with her elbow. I shoot her with a sharp look.

"Now that you ask me, Bird...," she dips and gyrates, "...yes, I remember one time in grade school. I was about thirteen I think." I feel my shoulders relax a notch. "I gave my teacher, Miss Figara, a present, a small wooden knife that I'd carved. You didn't know that I was an artist too, I bet. She was really moved by the gift, but when I walked out of her room into the hallway

there was this kid, Georgie Ortiz, waiting for me. What a mean puss he had. I can remember him saying to me, 'Weirdo likes the teacher,' something like that. I should have beaten him up. But I was too shaken. It's funny Bird, but you know, everytime I give a friend a special little gift, at least something I think is special, I'm still afraid somebody is going to laugh at me. " She actually looks like she could cry.

I suppress a distinct urge to comfort her. Where is she going now?

"Wait, Hera. I just want to say that the next time somebody calls you weird, just tell them what it really means, will you? And could you try to be less critical of me?" I can't stop tears flushing my eyes.

"Okay, baby, I hear you. You're okay. In fact, you are darn right gorgeous. I like your almond eyes. What say we go up on deck now and have a beer in the moonlight, teach. I've learned my lesson." Her whole face twinkles into a pleasant smile. Thank God she doesn't wink again. She salutes me and we laugh.

"I'd love a beer, captain."

We push our way to the sidelines. Again I'm aware of her height. Two women leave their seats as we approach—they seem to be moving on cue—giving us just enough room to squeeze between several others resting there.

"Okay, Bird." Hera lets out a giant sigh.

A cheerful looking woman with a big bow tie, who sits to our right, nods her head as if Hera had addressed her. "It's a bit crowded isn't it?" she says. We nod back amiably.

I would like to rest against Hera, but she might think I'm attracted to her in that way. I just want us to be friends.

"If this is truth-telling time," she whispers so the woman next to us can't hear, "I'll confess something to you. But promise me you won't make me do twenty stations of the cross."

"I won't, Hera. I won't even give you twenty lashings with a wet noodle."

She must come from a Catholic home; a Protestant would have said, "Promise me you won't lock me up in the basement."

"Oh, you are a gentle confessor, sweetheart," she mocks. I can almost see tension spill out of her as she settles into her seat, and says, "So I'll tell you that every time I see you standing up here, playing and singing your music like the Goddess herself had appeared, I feel first embarrassed and then challenged. I feel that the way you show complete strangers your emotions and make yourself so vulnerable challenges me to be more open too. But, you know, I'm kind of the Joan of Arc type. If I don't wear the pants in *my* family, who will? Even though men are threatened by my size, it's my jeans and flannel shirts that really put them off and that's what I like."

"Hera, Joan of Arc was murdered. It didn't seem to help her any that she wore men's clothes. They just hated her even more. They had to murder her because she was a powerful woman and a powerful force. Frankly, I don't think it matters what women wear. Obviously, it's the body language you use with men that attracts or puts them off. Maybe you ought to disguise yourself and wear long skirts like I do." She's not impressed when I fluff up my skirt for her.

"What do you want to be? A sacrificial lamb?"

"No. People are complex. You can't put yourself in a straight jacket."

"A dyke can never put herself in a straight jacket. Look, Bird, we have different approaches that's all. I wear armor and you probably wear an amulet. But who knows? Maybe under your poetical shoulders are sharp shoulder blades."

I try to think of a clever comeback.

"I need air quick!" she says. Is she playing with me? No, she seems to be having trouble breathing. "You witches and your cats," she gasps. "All they do for me is make me sick. I must get air...." She breaks off and lunges out of her seat, then forces her way through a wall of women.

It takes me several minutes to find her outside the swinging wooden doors, sucking on an atomizer.

I take deep gulps of the night air as if somehow that will help her breathe normally again. When finally her breaths are regular, she points out a new moon peering over the tops of trees.

"Okay, so what's your story?" she asks, obliquely.

"Are you all right now? Was that caused by cat hairs or what we were talking about?"

"Both. It's okay, baby. You can't be on top of everything. I'm all right now. What were you saying about people being complex?"

"That's what I said. People are complex. And since you guessed about my amulet, here, look at it." I feel for the crystal I wear around my neck hidden under my blouse. "How did you know I wear one? See, it breaks up light. Light comes in, moves around and then goes on its way. And since I tend to hold on too long to painful experiences, I thought it might help me."

"Does it work?" she asks, peering at the small crystal with some curiosity.

"It reminds me that I can absorb my experiences, learn from them and then let them go, just as the crystal takes in light and lets it pass on."

"I dig the way you work with objects, Bird. You put magic power into them. You could make a mint helping people decide what their power object was. But this is nice." She releases the small stone and it raps my collar bone.

"Hey," I say, "that hurts."

"Now be honest," she whispers, pulled into her own thoughts. "Do you think I'm a phony? Is that what you've been trying to tell me all evening?" She actually looks sinister to me right now as she continues. "Look, forget about your symbolic necklaces. You gotta be tough. Better believe my manners keep a lot of nasty people away. And you, you seem fragile as a flower. It's quite tempting to rip your petals apart. You won't last long, sweetie!"

"Hera, you're really something else. I was just beginning to trust you. I'm not all that open really. I've got some sense of self-protection, after all. I just like gentle people. Do you know what I really think? I think you don't trust me because I don't dress all the time like a tough dyke. You don't think I'm a real lesbian, do you?"

"Let's talk about it over a real cold beer. We can go to the top

deck and smell the rotten Hudson."

"Yah, let's get out of here," I sigh. I really don't like the way she keeps me on the defensive. "Hey, Hera," I shout at the large body moving away from me, "Why don't you imagine that the Hudson is filled with fish, turtles and clean water, just tonight?"

"For you, anything," she calls back. "But just for tonight. Tomorrow I'm meeting with *Women Stop Pollution.*"

She leads us up a series of wooden steps towards the second deck. "Tonight we can imagine what this river used to be like and what it's going to be like again in the future," she says.

What if I slip away from the boat for a while, forget the tangy smell of water, the nippy pleasure of cold beer, Hera's intense eyes, her bravado and go back a few hours to Mari? I want to make love with her again. I want to watch rough, orange cloth slip away again from her shoulders. I want to watch her full lips purse for my pleasure. She does not ask me to undress her; she is eager.

Her breasts are larger, fuller than mine. Her body is less angular. The lips of her vagina are more subtle. She is a rose. I am an orchid.

Can I really find those precious caresses, those whispers, the love words rooted in my memory? Can I feel her tongue again, thrusting inside me, making me swell with excitement? Can I taste the liquid from her sacred mouth? Can I remember what it was like for me to feel the touch of another woman's small hands, child hands, bird hands, bone hands on my sex?

I will spread my body on hers again. I will touch her soft, wet spots, the places she allows lovers to touch, but not herself—obedient still to those old chastisements. I will not let stern faces interrupt our pleasure.

My hand is at her entrance. My nose welcomes the rush of fragrant odors. My fingers enter her. They are held by her labial folds.

Let the language of my hands thrill her again. Let my tongue discover the softness of her neck, the precious crevices under her arms, the weight of each breast, the tips of her fingers, the

sensitive places between her toes. When my tongue meets hers we laugh recklessly and I let my weight rest into her for the first time.

Now Mari calls me to her. The beast in her groans. She nips my cheeks, my nose. She growls in my ear.

I throw my arms around her and hug her so hard my muscles ache. The joy in having someone to love is intoxicating. I growl back and sit on her mound of wiry hair. I spread open my lower lips. She does too. We caress each other. Is this the tenderness I have been told will drive me mad? Forget other people's fears now. Be sexual for her, with her.

Our bodies move in long, slow arcing waves. I am rowing back and forth with her. We arch and bend until our clitorises flame. Then skillfully she moves under me until her tongue is on my vagina. I rise up on my knees so she can move under me with ease. She kisses my inner lips and enters the chamber of my uterus with her fingers. She is skilled at touching.

She is making me feel immensely organic, immensely alive.

I am sensation. I am butterfly fluttering to her sweet tongue. I am colors and scents. I am flower all open. I am expanding liquid. I am waves rocking Mari. I am coming.

I feel for the bone around her neck telling me she is from the Land of Pampa. I feel for the tiny beads around her ankle telling me she is wedded to herself. We are not getting married, we are making love. Her loveliness wants mine. Her passion is affirmed by mine. We both long to be met as well as to be seen.

She lies back and I take over. My mouth is in her wetness, her flesh. I suck her throbbing vulva and bring her to orgasm and then another until she and I blend into another organic flowering. I pull the sheet over us as she wraps her limbs about my wet body. Our blending takes us into a peaceful and deep sleep.

Water is slapping on freshly painted wood. Bubbles of white paint overlap green trim. On the lower deck I feel the engine of the boat purr through my feet, ankles, knees, thighs, hips as though I were riding the back of a great cat. Val, Grace, Irene and I are devouring chunks of Vermont cheddar, peaches and

sourdough bread between sips of cold grape juice. They don't drink any more. Hera is off somewhere finding recruits for her ecology meeting; she wasn't joking after all.

Val runs an advertising agency. She is short, pugnacious, vibrant and unfortunately, at odds with me. We were once lovers. I left her for Audrey because she was always criticizing me. I sang too loudly. Dressed too casually. I didn't set the table correctly. When even our lovemaking became a source of tension I left her. Now Val is living with Grace.

Grace and I worked in a women's ritual theater group together during the early 70 s. That was before she became a therapist. She is easygoing, artistic, and predictable, all that Val admires. Grace only seems predictable though, just as I seem unpredictable. They share the language of amibitious professional women. Grace's wholesomeness offers a resting place for Val's anxieties. I watch them enjoy each other in a way that Val and I never did. Their differences seem to enrich their companionship.

Irene is a close friend to both of them. I know her from the Teahouse. I often wonder how a beautiful woman like Irene— a kind of Bette Davis and Lauren Becall blend— ends up working for so little pay when she could have had a lucrative career as a model. I wonder that and then I laugh. She's not the only one who didn't choose a lucrative career!

I am fascinated by the way Irene rotates her attention skillfully between Val and Grace, accommodating both women. They seem to need her to round out the polarizing tendency in coupling. I imagine her being the spirit breath that joins them. I guess she needs them to fill out her shape too.

Though they are friendly and share their food with me, I feel tense in their presence. Lonely. An outsider. They appear to be more at ease now about their lives than I feel. I guess I will always be grappling with mine. Sudden awkwardnesses in speaking come upon me. I stumble, change words around and mix up facts. When Val describes me to the others as a 'creativeholic,' they laugh— at me, rather than with me, I suspect. Of course, she still needs to hurt me, just as I hurt her once. I would not

give up my friendship with Josh and that made her doubt my love for her. Though she asks how my music is coming along, she never comes to my concerts any more. We never found a way to enjoy our differences.

Val and Grace are describing their trip to the Caribbean.

I think immediately, how sad that people have to slave at their jobs all year for the brief pleasure and reward of two weeks of sand, sun, and water. Irene acts fascinated, but I feel uncomfortable even with her humorous accounts of what happens to English ladies when they drink rum and romp with the 'natives.'

Suddenly I feel a twinge in my chest. I miss Mari terribly. Why isn't she here with me?

Because, Judith, you made the decision to come without her.

Because I really don't want her to be an exotic, intoxicating creature for me.

Judith, maybe you should tell someone here about her. Make her more real.

I think about her words to me. "How could you leaves me now like a pees of shit, after we make love?" Her legs were wrapped around me; her voice cut me like a knife. "You are cruel, Norte Americana. Maybe I won't be here when you come back."

She and I won't have a chance to work out any complexities between us. Mari's home is on the other side of the world. In Argentina. She is in this country for only a few months. I don't want to get hurt.

Just keep breathing deeply.

You can get through this!

I excuse myself from the three women. I need to be alone to breathe deeply.

On the deck I am surrounded by strangers. Moonlight brushes their shapes and casts strange shadows on the white walls of the boat. I can feel its cool heat. I sit down on one of the benches. Women are huddled all around me in small groups, inspiring each other with news and stories. Slow music pulses from the doorway leading to the dance area. I start to sway with the beat.

Close my eyes. Let myself go into the rocking of the music, the rocking of the boat.

As I begin to relax, snatches of the conversation with Val, Irene and Grace come to mind. But I want to forget them. Just be alone with myself.

In the distance two voices blur into the sounds of the motor; behind my closed eyelids the voices swoop back and forth like a pair of seagulls dipping into the water. "I don't know if I should tell you this but I think I am in love with you." This voice is hushed and slightly apologetic. I imagine the speaker performing a mothering gesture one does to show tenderness, perhaps brushing stray hairs from the other's cheek. What a perfect night to declare new love.

"But you can't be," the other voice responds nervously. "It will ruin everything." The voice hardens. "In fact, we won't be able to see each other again if you are." The voices seem familiar.

The second woman continues anxiously. "I don't want to lose what we do have."

"It was tearing me up not to tell you." The first woman speaks again, her voice rough, insistent. "It frightens you, dear? Is it so terrible? You can't keep me from being in love, you know. I tried to talk myself out of it, believe me I did. Listen, do you think I need to mess up a nice friendship and a solid relationship by falling in love with you? I think of you all the time."

The second woman moans, "Oh, my Goddess," then is silent.

"Your face haunts me," her admirer replies. "I want to touch you, kiss you...."

"No, we can't," is the panicked response. "She's coming back any moment now. She would die. I love you both so much. I don't want this. A threesome is not my cup of tea. Please, this is impossible. She would be so hurt."

After a pause a voice cries, "What's so wrong with loving you?"

Their voices mix with the faraway sounds of plaintive music. The words, "she would be so hurt," go by me again, printed on a page in Helvetica style like the typeface I use at work. I open

my eyes.

Did I dream the conversation?

A rush of electricity shoots through me. Ahead and to the right of me, partly hidden by two young dykes rubbing together like birches in the wind, Grace and Irene sit, tense, solemn. Where is Val? Grace is declaring her love for Irene. Funny how I didn't recognize them immediately. And how can I hear them at this distance? My mind must be a shortwave radio.

Grace is articulating unnameable, unspeakable longings for Irene. I want to hide. I don't want to know this. Must I tell Val? Protect her? She won't be able to take it. She made me her confidant in her relationship with Grace. Earlier, she had pulled me aside as she offered me a glass of juice. "At last I'm married, Judith," she whispered. "Grace and I love each other so much."

I had looked at her hard and squeezed her hand. I knew her reason for saying this to me held angry emotions. She was also saying, "See, Judith, Grace loves me as you could not." I am both her enemy and her friend. I know her deepest longings.

I don't want to be here. I don't want to know this. I want to be on a pleasure trip.

I decide to walk about the boat. What if we were on a long journey together? The weight of so many souls would be tiring. Imagine what immigrants felt, shoved together like cattle, yet fed by dreams. Better to be on a sailboat with a few close friends.

My concern for Val's welfare lifts. I will approach whomever I am attracted to and talk to them. I can begin simply by asking, "Are you enjoying the boat ride?"

I watch the tree-lined shore slip by. Everything is moving: myself, the boat, the river, the cars inching along the highway above the river. The people in the cars are talking, gesturing, lighting a cigarette, lifting a handkerchief to a nose. The earth underneath is in motion. I want always to connect to this natural state of fluidity, transformation.

I know that being clamped to a desk in one of the billion small offices in the city is not reality. The rectangular rooms and buildings with corners which break up flowing movements, the ugly chairs and plastic plants which flatten the imagination seem

now to have purposely been constructed to limit the universe of motion, of change. The self-conscious swirl of social activities, the bustle in places for consuming culture and food serve to dull me and prevent me from realizing that I live and ride on a sphere revolving in the universe. The highest skyscraper in the world, the latest hairdo, the fanciest dinner, the most sophisticated thought won't alter my short, definite mortality, nor will it keep me from seeing the destruction all around me. The nuclear weapons, the radioactive wastes, the chemical dumps, the acid rain which flood my world are threatening our natural cycles. We are not being allowed to live or die naturally.

A thought I wrote in my journal the day before comes to mind. *You yourself become a boat. Hug the waves. Move through water. And carry in you others who have the inclination to ride.*

Of course, 500 lesbians want to walk on water. Five hundred flat, round stones skip down the Hudson on the liquid flow of water. I touch water for the water touches me; everywhere water embraces me. Finding myself in the thought of water, I begin to breathe deeply again from my center.

Ahead, a particular motion attracts my eyes. A figure bends and lifts a trap door in the floor. The person peers down, apparently checking for something. I am struck by the realization that the person is not a woman, but a man. I experience a momentary fright, a desire to warn others. "Help. Man on board!" What is a man doing here? My breathing quickens, my muscles tense. Then I understand. Certainly men are on board. They are 'manning' the boat. We are only renters, legitimate trespassers for four hours. We had to hire a crew. Is it unusual that the workers are men? No.

On his haunches, he searches, gropes and picks up an object invisible to me. Having done this he closes the trap door, rises and walks to the railing to light a cigarette. My attention moves from him to my own thoughts once more. Automatically presuming he is married, I wonder what he will say to his wife tonight. Will he make up dirty stories about lesbians to humor her, jokes which actually degrade and falsify us, and her? Will

she laugh with him? If so, will it be from boredom, ignorance, fear? Will his jokes make an annoying ache that lingers? Does it excite him to be on a ship with 500 women? Perhaps it would not if he knew that some would just as soon see him dead as alive.

Thoughts like these are rippled by the appearance of another figure. A tough dyke in a black motorcycle jacket and tight blue jeans walks toward the workman. What a duo! The woman is probably as tough as that boat mechanic thinks he is. The man's strength is assumed; the woman's has been obtained through struggle. Two creatures within a few feet of each other and yet centuries apart in comprehension of the other, centuries away from a common language.

To my amazement, the woman stops by the man and asks him for a light. Perhaps she's an organizer of the event and has to work out practicalities with the crew. Or maybe there's a maintenance problem; the sound system broke; they ran out of ice in the bar. There could be any number of reasons why she would need to talk to him. I watch them closely and try to read their gestures. Why does the man take off his cap and run his fingers through his hair? Why does she stick both of her hands in her jeans pockets and keep the cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth? Why does he keep looking away from her when she talks? Is he threatened by her? She does none of the things that he must expect women to do—smile and bat their eyes.

Batting one's eyes is such a strange gesture, possibly a manifestation of nervousness, though interpreted by men as flirtation and a sign that the woman willingly courts the man's attention. I watch women flutter eyelashes when they sense danger, as birds ruffle feathers and porcupines raise quills.

I am sure the woman in front of me is not batting her eyes at that man at all. Now he flicks the cigarette butt into the water and spits into his hands, rubbing them together. The woman has not removed her eyes from him the whole time. She seems on guard for any aggressive gesture on his part.

Then something unbelieveable happens. She moves up to

him and seems to whisper in his ear. He looks quickly from side to side to see if anyone is watching, so I, with the quickness of a fox, step back further into the shadow cast by the upper deck. I sense danger. With the deftness of a cop reaching for his gun, the man reaches into his shirt pocket under his blue jacket, retrieves some object which I can't see, gives it to her then draws his hand across the front of her pants and for one second caresses the area between her legs. I see her head arch back, not with anger but passivity. Then she steps back, turns away from him having already pocketed the object given to her and walks quickly away, cigarette still dangling from her mouth. He moves back to the side of the boat, places both hands on the railing and looks again, side to side to see if anyone is watching.

My heart beats rapidly. I don't know what to make of what I've seen. It happened so quickly. I wonder. Has moonlight painted innocent actions with frightening shades and inspired me to conjure up a furtive and unmentionable scene? Has sexual tension and chaos from the dance floor set off an image of heterosexual intrigue, unleashed an image lurking in my own mind? Did they know each other? What is it they exchanged? Drugs? Jewels? Money? And the familiar sexual gesture. I am baffled. I want to move away quickly as my instinct for survival tells me that if that man sees me, I will be in trouble.

Borrowing the deer's agility I slip away until I come to the swinging doors leading into a large room with rows of seats where several women talk together in small groups. Relieved, I move quickly through them and head for the far side of the room to a bench where two friendly-looking women sit. I need warmth and welcome. I nestle in near them, closing my eyes to steady myself.

The scene I just witnessed has etched itself in my mind as does an object that you have stared at for a long time. I don't resist watching a replay, but I feel a strong need to change the characters.

I imagine that the boatman who I had understood so completely as a man by his every gesture was in fact a woman. A woman so skilled in interpreting mannerisms of men that she

has passed herself off as one of them in order to be hired by the boat union or whatever union hires the maintenance crew. She can hide her curves and female parts beneath the coarse flat lines of the worker's uniform. She can hide her vulnerability and emotions inside practical gestures and considerations needed for the mechanical operations of boat maintenance. She can earn a decent living by posing as a man and she is protected by the male persona she carries around with her. Maybe Hera is right. Women who pose as men are safer.

But then the other one? That person whose body bent back in momentary passionate response? She is the lover who has joined the lesbian boat ride to rendevous with her sweetheart. The familiarity of their encounter calls up animals who have bared their necks to each other in surrender and trust. And the mysterious object passed between them could have been something as commonplace as an aspirin, chewing gum, a tampax, some necessary item the one had stored in her bag or tool kit locked in the hatch. Only the moonlight and my active mind, prone to find intrigue even in ordinary transactions, would invent a drama of stolen rubies, counterfeit money. Once again my imagination has been activated on the boat ride.

I'm aware of the hard wooden bench beneath me. Its solidness is comforting. I feel the dampness in the air. The beer I had with Hera has made me drowsy. I would like to curl up near a warm body and sleep for a while. The objects around me rearrange themselves.

The ship becomes a house, that gray wooden house; the bench across from me becomes its steps, painted rose like a mouth. Posts along the deck become sturdy pines and pliant birch. They fall into position beside the house. Let the door of the house swing open—I will resist entering it this time.

I am sucked back to the summer before Mari came into my life when my emotions were being tugged this way and that like clothes on a line pinned up against the wind. Will I find a clue to the reason her entrance into my life seemed so right? I will crouch in the slender grasses beside the one oak tree, which pierces the sky like a mast; I will be rooted solidly, a safe dis-

tance from Dolphin's home, the grayed New England house I see so clearly again.

* * *

Dolphin has sleek black hair and soft brown eyes, ineffable as a doe's eyes. But it is the way she clenches her jaw that I will always remember. I can tell when things aren't going well for her; the muscles in her jaw work continually—that's when I feel my heart go out to her the most.

I have arrived earlier than expected to pick up my belongings. She asked me to move out of the house the week before, but I needed some time with an old friend before I could go through with her request.

The mosquitoes and I wait for her blue station wagon to enter the driveway. We keep cool in the shadow of the oak tree. Will I witness her walk through the front door alone, without me? Then will I enter and tell her I have come to pack?

Her ex-husband insisted that she not live with me. If she does not comply with this command, he will reduce alimony and take her to court as an unfit mother. They have been divorced for five years.

Since the earnings from her two part-time teaching jobs are small, she needs the steady sum of money coming in every month from him to support her family. Facing the issue in court is a luxury Dolphin cannot afford, nor is she prepared emotionally to do battle in this public way. His threats cause many of her fears to flare: she will be labelled *queer*; her children, John and Sue, will be harassed at their school; she will be fired from her teaching job; her parents will stop talking to her. All of these fears are based in reality.

Although she is aware that I have come out publicly as a lesbian in the women's community, she feels neither comfortable nor safe with me. And being sexually attracted to me because of my courage is not stable enough grounds to hold us together during this trying time. I am also unused to the problems involved in childrearing when one's sexual preference is not acceptable in the community. As more and more people in the small town where we live begin to stare and whisper at us in

public places, I too feel uncomfortable and frightened.

She eagerly makes love with me but will not let me sleep with her. I feel both used and abandoned. She thought I would bring her release and be a doorway into an easier life. I thought we could make a home together and share the care of her children.

Though she assures me that if she had no children, she would be marching in the forefront of the feminist movement, my outspoken views make her wince. In her presence I begin to feel like a flashing neon sign, heralding lesbianism. I understand her discomfort around some of my actions; she is right, rose-colored front steps do draw attention to themselves—I was trying to help her fix up the steps *gaily*—but rose steps do not bespeak homosexuality.

I never expected our relationship to be blessed by the mayor, Mr. Hoffman, or the Lutheran minister, Reverend Krinsky; still I had hoped for some peace of mind.

I am not her first woman lover. When we met the year before at the dinner party of a mutual friend, she had recently separated from June, the woman she had lived with for several years after separating from George. I was not plucking a spring chicken. She had strong, complicated needs and a gnawing impulse to make her own meanings. Inspired stories appeared on her desk regularly. She smiled coyly whenever I asked her about them.

Gradually I learn that George had accepted June as a companion for Dolphin. He believed they shared karma. And since they kept the nature of their relationship hidden, both to the community and to themselves—they never used the word *lesbian,* but, then, maybe they never made love—there was no cause for alarm. The time I met them, their shared karma was shot through with resentment, anger and boredom.

Dophin reached out to me first during this period of separation—I reached back. We both needed to love and to touch whether we shared karma or not. We both needed adult companionship. Though June was absent during our weeks together, her presence remained. I see now that new lovers ought to find new places to share. They had lived together in the same gray farmhouse that Dolphin had shared with George. When the go-

ing got extremely rough between Dolphin and me, I dreamt she ran back to the familiar body of her past companion, offering the new lovemaking techniques she and I had explored.

With so many elements against us, it is understandable that we could not distinguish our problems clearly. Which were caused by the homophobia around us, which by the homophobia within ourselves? Finally I understood. She was being consumed by the fear of loss of her children and I could not comfort or help her. There was nothing else for me to do but leave her. That act alone could bring some peace in our lives. Of course, I felt angry and hurt.

As I dig into welcoming earth by the oak tree, needing to feel connected to something else alive, the sound of a car alerts me. A second car follows. I look through the grass and see Dolphin get out of her blue car. I see June emerge from her white one. They walk together arm in arm to the house. At the foot of the front porch steps they stop.

Dolphin points to the fresh paint. "Judith painted these. Isn't she funny?" She tries to laugh lightly, but sighs instead.

They enter the house together.

Waves of turbulent emotions run through me. What should I do? Shout at them from my hiding place? Get in my car and leave before she knows I am here? Leave all of my things behind in her house? Let her deal with my mementos as I have had to deal with the leftovers of others?

Or should I get a stick, run in there and give them both raps on the shoulder? Wake up! Wake up! This is just a rotten nightmare. Sisterhood really is powerful and we can help each other.

Or perhaps I should claim Dolphin. But that's ridiculous. She doesn't want to be with me. She can't be with me.

I slowly walk into the house and join them in the kitchen. "Hello," I hear my voice say.

They both turn simultaneously and look at me as if I were a ghost. They look through me, around me, anywhere but at me.

"When did you come back?" Dolphin's voice shakes. "I didn't see your car."

June remains tight-lipped. She will reveal nothing.

"I came back to get my belongings." I speak in a small tight voice. It sounds like my father's voice.

"June and I are talking, Judith." Dolphin seems tiny, as if far away. She doesn't invite me to sit with them.

I turn around and walk to "my room," the room that no longer is mine, the room in which Dolphin and June had slept and embraced before I knew her. I begin to pack my things.

"I'm sorry," a distant voice says.

"For what?" My own voice replies.

My eyes are clouded and I can hardly make out the objects I am packing. I can hardly see the shape in the doorway. I turn away from Dolphin for I cannot bear to be near her. I cannot bear to think about her any more.

I will return to the river, to the boat and to the happier memory of the healing lovemaking Mari and I share.

* * *

I float through smoke and conversations to the women's room of the Hudson River boat, looking forward to a few moments by myself on the toilet. My hands feel for the purple skirt; it is still there. And so is the small comb I tucked in its pocket.

At least ten women are waiting, not too patiently, in line. Some look for themselves in the row of mirrors. Others continue conversations started on the dance floor, or on deck in the moonlight. Those who want a quiet moment with themselves are looking through their bags and pockets searching for something to occupy their attention. Everyone is busy assuring the others they are not there to cruise.

I am among those trying to see myself in the mirror. A woman seated in front of me in a drab chair blocks my attempts. She is familiar. Do I know her or does she remind me of someone? Her jacket catches my attention, a black leather jacket with a spirited dragon sewn on it. Her pants are skin tight.

I know her! She is the woman I saw a half hour before in a strange confrontation on deck with her lover. I smile in recognition. I can see her face quite clearly despite the smudges on the mirror. She is so engrossed with her ritual that I need not fear

being noticed by her.

She removes a small leather pouch tied to her belt and retrieves first a comb, then a lipstick and a small perfume atomizer. A bike dyke with cosmetics is intriguing. We both dressed up for this boat ride. We are sister performers. A veil of moonlight had hidden her mask. How carefully she applies the delicate shade to her lips then moves them back and forth before blotting them with a tissue. When she sprays perfume behind each ear, the room is filled with the scent of lilac.

Someone behind me nudges me forward. I must keep my eyes on that woman in the mirror. She picks up a small yellow comb and draws it through her hair carefully. Blond curls about three inches long resist the teeth. She pulls the comb with one hand and holds onto her head with the other. Her mouth twists with concentration. When she pulls the comb through her hair again, I see she is wearing a wig. The comb has caught in the synthetic hairs, jarring the wig aside. I see short, black hairs, side-burns and a barely visible stubble of beard. Her face is heavily powdered.

I gasp, push into the toilet just vacated by a short-cropped woman in a smart suit and sit down heavily on the seat. That woman, the tough lesbian in a motorcycle jacket and snug blue jeans is a man! A man parading as a woman. So the boatman he met on deck is a man too, I guess. I don't really know any more. Whether they are men or women or a combination of both, there is no doubt that they are lovers. Should I tell someone there's a man in the women's room?

The boat to Bear Mountain returns on schedule to the Manhattan docks. A lot of money was raised for the Lesbian Cultural Center. I'm sure that several women made plans to meet for dinner the next week, that handfuls fell in love, clusters had important talks they couldn't have in more mundane environments. Though we all still have to walk the hard streets of the city again, we feel inspired to continue our struggles, our endeavors. Small changes have taken place, and some large ones too! Besides, moving on water is always restful.

I walk down the gangplank laughing with Robin. She says she

had fantasized falling overboard and being rescued by a rich woman in a helicopter.

One of the men in the boat crew points me out to his buddy as we walk down the pier. "Look at that one," he roars. "She's wearing a skirt."

I look away from him and think of Mari asleep in my room, waiting for me to come home. I am glad to be a woman loving her, another woman.

* * *

Miercoles 3 de febrero en la Siriri Arroyo

Our beloved sweet terrible bird tree aerolito human, Judith, mi pequeña.

On the long night I think you. I touch you in each little rencle of my hand. I dream you in my hair where still your hands dance. The bonne-stone, the rock-fish, all the time talk me about you. On the long morning with a pale sun walking slow, now, into the room and making at front my eye the gold little spots of your eyes. I tryt to jump against the English language for to tell you about me.

I miss the informal aspects of the people of your country. The easy smile. The dirty snack bars, and some kind of energy that still is alive there. Also, I begin to feel that I'm talking alone too much about feminist awareness. The majority of men smile sarcastly. The feminist are "the women with problems" and the women in general seem they look to me like if I would be alittle crazy. Of course, I hardly can to talk about it at all, but when I do it seem like I were foreign.

I have still problems of communication because the structure of the English language it is inside my head.

I miss that horrible and imperialist country that is your country, with much beautiful people inside and pigeons and squirrels and cockroach. The last year I understood that all generalization is false, and that America is only one in many ways. I love you my little rabbit.

Judith, mi pequeña, corazon de oro tatuado en mis manos, yo te amo y te amo, y la distancia y el tiempo parecen hechos de

una materia tan sutil, tan transparente, que te puedo tener a traves de ellos, intacta, en el mio cuore.

A woodpecker works on a giant tree so near to me. There is a lot of birds, blue and yellow and black coming here these days from I don't know where. Times ago I wrote you a couple of letters you seemed not receive. I listen again and again the cassets of that beautiful, strange, painful song with the voice of waters, the sound of footsteps.

I made a long silent where I didn't write you and other friends. I had a lot of problems and work. My health was not so good and a hard winter I hope will soon finish. But specially I did not wrote you because I cannot answer the beautifulness of all your feelings and questions. I'm here and I will be here yet. I don't know for how long.

There is four months I'm working on translations. Now the book is almost ready. In two weeks more I will give the book to a publisher that have some interest.

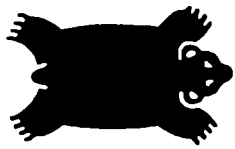
Slowly I'm going on with my guitar, Torcaza and with life. Something is doing a music inside me, like inside trees, animals and stones. But I seem to struggle against that. I get upset and sad too much often.

I stopped working for the magazine because the male chauvinisit and commercial mentality they finally showed me.

Where will be you now, love? In which landscape and in which body? Summer making its road there. A hot sun through which you will be swimming. Give my strong love to Josh. Judith, you and me will rebirth again and again like my land, like the seasons, because there is a road and we need to walk together.

Te abrazo fuerte me querida. You will never vanish from my heart.

Mari



DINNER

"You two eats too fast!"

Mari's voice jumps across delicious, steamy plates of food. She has fiber in her voice. "I can't concentrate on the tastes when you do that," she scolds.

She forks a tender mushroom, dripping butter, then grins disarmingly at Josh.

Josh lives in the studio next door to mine. We often share meals. We lived together for ten years—eight of those years we were married. We were separated for a year before I met Mari. We might still be living together if it were up to him. However, I finally had to end a way of living that left me confused and exhausted. I felt dishonest, still sharing quarters with him after becoming lovers with women.

Josh had cooked Mari's favorite meal: steak, mushrooms, potatoes and broccoli. We pawed the table, similar to mine—a huge spool that once held telephone cable—ravenous as dogs.

Now she leans towards me with a coy look. "Cut my beefs," she says.

"I'm not your mother, toots. Cut up your own food."

And there goes Josh—all concentration centered on the little broccoli trees and whole garlic cloves slicked in olive oil. I'd better get my share quick!

I've tried to convince them both to become born again vegetarians. It hasn't worked. Josh is a devoted meat eater, who loves vegetables. "What's the big deal?" he asks. "Do I have to

love one or the other?" Mari, on the other hand, assures me she will become a vegetarian for economic as much as health reasons when she returns to Argentina. Only in this country can she afford meat, because other people can afford to buy it for her.

"I am so happiest here, Mari and Josh," she croons, hot potato and cold sour cream sliding down her throat. Good, now that she's not dishing out any more orders I can get into my food.

"Mari, don't say 'happiest.' Just say 'I'm so happy here.'" Josh loves to instruct her, at anything.

"I'm so uglies here," she retorts, showing a funny face and rolling eyes.

"No, Mari, say 'I'm so ugly here," he says.

Ordinarily he doesn't let anything come between himself and good food. His body shape seems to change when he eats; tall, slender and relaxed, in front of food he thickens and tenses. Fierce tunnel vision occurs. He must really love Mari; he enjoys her company at all times. Still I just know that bits of meat and potato are going to end up scattered in his salt and pepper bush of a beard. He is still dear to me.

"Youse not uglies, Josh. Youse is beautiful to me." She looks like an adorable child. I'm not jealous either. Her sexual passion lies with me. I want them to have fun together.

He says, "No, Mari, that isn't the way you say it. You have to say, 'I feel ugly' not 'I'm so uglies.' "

This is one of her favorite words. Today his pedantry challenges some good conversations between us. I tense up whenever he corrects her. Maybe because he seemed to speak to her as if she were a child, the one we never had together.

"So who's feeling ugly, meine kindele?" I ask. "Mari's having a great time with her Norte Americanos. Right, Mari?"

"I am so happy we is together," she responds.

Half of one of her front teeth is missing; she pushes her tongue through the gap and gurgles, dispelling my attempt to make her a grownup.

"*Are* together, Mari. You use *is* for a single person. She *is* happy. But they *are* happy." Josh is a patient teacher.

They do seem like father and child to me. I want my mature, South American lover back, but I am glad they get along so well.

"She is happy when the threes of us are together," she coos.

"Hey, I like that 'she' business, Mari," I say. "Did you know I started to write stories about myself in the third person? Not to make myself generic, but to get some distance, some perspective on it all. Using 'I' seems so limited, especially since my 'I' is always changing. When I use 'she' as the protagonist I can feel myself expanding."

"Why don't you give names to the 'shes' and expand your point of view to those of other people. That's what fiction writers do," Josh says.

"I'm too concerned at how my 'shes' see the world at this point in my life, thanks," I say.

"Oh, Judith. That's why I love you so much. Sometimes you have the expression of a leetle baby," Mari looks at me affectionately. "You seem to enjoy to talk with your face as much as with the words. And you give New York City so many expressions for me. And yet you can't to escape some of your peculiarities—how you whine sometimes, like cry when you don't get what you want. Like you get all nervous and tense. Like a so leetle kitten wanting mama."

Josh nods in agreement with her.

"Well, maybe you're right. But I'm not the only leetle kid here. Sometimes being with the two of you makes me tense. I mean three is not an easy combination. It reminds me too much of mother, father, child. Four is an easier combination. I don't know." My hand tightens around the cold wine glass.

"Judith, the true is that there is a lot of tension between you two. Sometimes I think you would both be more comfortable if you didn't live next door to each other. Seems like you're both cryin' alot with each other." She is picking up some of my expressions, like *alot.*

My smile disappears. My hand tightens more. Mari's smart. But I just can't let go of him and all those years we shared struggling together to make change. He is still family for me. He has replaced my blood brother. We have struggled to go beyond the

prejudices of our childhoods. We do speak a language that tries to consider significant others, many significant others.

"Judith, what you thinkin'?" Mari's directness always startled me.

"I...I was still thinking about how I like to talk about myself in the third person. It gets me away from myself in a helpful way. Like taking a walk away from my house clears up my thinking.

"Remember Josh, when we lived in Vermont—remind me, Mari, to tell you about the time a guy we let stay with the theater collective in the country asked if he could cook dinner for us all. Dinner turned out to be the legs of all my frog friends from our pond. I thought I would kill him. But I'm not going to tell you at the dinner table—anyway, Josh, are you listening? I used to walk into the hills in back of the house so I could see it from a distance and reflect on all the heavy stuff we were always going through with each other. It really helped."

"Is that why you disappeared all the time, babe?" Josh slides a fat baked potato on my plate. He seems to be done eating already. "But it sounds funny, pretentious, to talk about 'she'."

"Well, we can't all think like you do, peanut head," I say. He moves away when I try to snatch part of a broccoli tree from his beard. "But I really don't want to argue with you, Josh, so let's change the topic. Does anyone want some tea?"

"I'll have some peppermint. How about some maté, Mari? Judith got some for you. Didn't you, Judith?" He reaches for the after dinner cigar in his shirt pocket. "You know, babe," a sly grin creeps across his face, "did you ever consider that you might have trouble saying 'I' because you're a double header?"

"Thanks, sweetheart, but I've thought of it maybe a million times. But this is one time my eccentricity can't be summed up by your double talk and, please, leave my sister, Meredith, out of this."

"Would it matters to you both if I just keeps drinking the red wine I brought for our dinner?" As she speaks, Mari tips her wine glass to her lips, not waiting for a reply.

"You drink it, Mari, so Judith doesn't drink any more. *She's* had enough. *She's* already slurring her words."

"Josh, you're not my father!" My resolution not to be testy with him flies out the window. "I'll decide how much I can drunk. Oh fuck it! Now I can't talk straight. It's all your fault, Josh."

"That's because you already had three glasses, Judith. I saw you." A stream of cigar smoke comes at me.

"You're not my watchdog."

"See," he retorts. "You always get nasty when you drink."

"But you're egging me on, Josh."

"Stoppits. Stoppits. Josh, Judith can pick if she wants more wine or not." Mari hands me her half-full glass of wine.

"Thanks for defending me, Mari. Does anyone want some tea? Well, I'm going to put the water on anyway."

As I head for the sink Josh sings out, "Picture me upon your knees. Tea for three and three to tease...." He stops suddenly, overcome by some thought.

Was he thinking, "When am I going to find a woman to be close to again?" Maybe Mari is right. Maybe I should move far away from him so he can feel free to start over again without me, so I can stop worrying about him.

Just as suddenly his face lights up.

"Oh, meine dearest kindele," he exclaims.

"Josh, how can you be so silly when you've hardly had any wine?" My voice cracks. "It's like you're high without needing to take anything. Isn't he?"

"He is so beautiful. I loves him so much," Mari responds.

I reach for the tea kettle.

"You know, Judith, when you say you like to call yourself a 'she' instead of an 'I', and think of yourself as different people, some peoples would say you were like crazy, like schizophrenics. Everybody else in your country is so much into the 'I' generation." We all laugh.

"I do. I can't help it if I feel like different people at different times. Doesn't everybody? By the way Mari, honey, you use she all the time. Who says, 'The rock she is hard and the boy she is funny?' That cracks me up."

"Don't be upsets with me. I understand perfectly. I like your differently people. I never get bor-ed with you."

"So there you are! I'm a fascinating'she'. You know, Mari, you really surprise me. You use more four syllable words in English than my friends do. Where did you learn fancy, shrink jargon?"

"The Chicano people I stay with in California used that word alot. They know all them words: schizophrenic, paranoia, neurotica, because when they go to a clinics and say they is upset, the doctors throw these words on them to confuse them and make them think to be something funny with themselves. Not with them government and oppressive system. Believe me, Judith, I know what you are talking about. So they go away and buys Jack Daniels and drinks and drinks until they catch it. Until they knows what's being done to them. The injusticia done to them make them felt and act loco, like crazies people and then they is handcuff and told they is eschizophrenics."

I say, "It's all fucked up. Have some more wine with me? A schizophrenic society breeds schizophrenic citizens. The government actually thinks it's doing good by preserving Native Americans on reservations. Imagine, first they take away their land and then they parcel it back with all kinds of constraints. No wonder people withdraw when they can't take the reality that's dished out to them; it becomes a necessity to invent different behaviours for different occasions.

"You become different people too, Josh, when you smoke and eat. Could I interrupt your cigar meditación and ask you to pass me the broccoli? Por favor?"

Josh points to my wine glass and shakes his head no. I have to retrieve the broccolli myself.

Mari says, "It's important to keep clear, Judith, that your use of 'she' instead of 'I' is so conscious mechinism to express the ways you experience the reality; it is very different than the eschizophrenic who are not in control—possible because of chemical imbalance or hereditary assault."

"I know, Mari, but sometimes I'm not sure I am in charge of what I do. Life lives us too. And sometimes I think, well, maybe it's true."

"What?" Josh sends puffs of smoke rings in my direction,

"That you really do drink too much wine?"

"Stop sticking pins into me, Josh. You know what I mean. Maybe I am a bit of a multi-person. Don't forget, I was born double. But so what? At least I can keep track of them."

"I wish you women would see me as a multiple personality," Josh says. "I can't stand it when you talk about men as if we were all alike. That's what happened in the theater group. Katie started the plot to get everyone to hate me, because I was a man. That's true isn't it?"

"Well, in a way it was. But we had to become stronger on our own. Maybe you were too helpful; that doesn't work either."

"You should write a story about that," he adds.

"I have to write my own story first," I say.

"You can explain things sometimes better in art; show different viewpoints at the same time. But I think you have to change that story where you used 'she' all the time. It sounded funny. You can't go around talking about yourself like that. At least use 'I' sometimes."

"So, Josh, do you make all the rules here? No wonder I get you mixed up with my mother. You both have it all worked out what you can and can't do. You are both very strong-willed people. Every time I express myself to her, she ends up telling me I'm vulgar. And everytime I try to talk to you, you think I'm nuts. I think I'm just telling it like it is. For a radical, you can be so conservative. I really think that if you were homosexual or even bisexual you would know more what I'm talking about."

"Don't play games with yourself, Judith. The important thing as an artist is—are you communicating with as many people as possible."

"I think homosexual artists bend backwards trying to communicate to other people, to not offend others. We don't have set behavior rules to go by like you heteros do. We have to make up our rules as we go along."

"Hetero-smetero, you know what I mean. Stop acting dumb. You know the difference between a literary gimmick and getting at the truth don't you?"

"Truth-smuth. Everybody's got their own damn truth. Here,

do you want this ashtray for that disgusting cigar?"

"Stoppits! Stoppits! I can't stand when you fights." Mari's eyes flash.

"Besides, it's not even grammatically correct, and no one would understand you." He very carefully grinds the lit end of the cigar into the shell that serves as ashtray until no more fire remains then places the half-smoked cigar inside the shell. "I'm going to smoke the rest when I have some solitude."

Mari does look upset. "We use that same word, *vulgar*, that your mother thinks you, Judith. But what means it to you?"

"Oh, something like ignorant, coarse."

"I thought so, but to us it mean also something quite different. For us it can mean something positive that comes from the people or something used by the working-class peoples. It doesn't have to have derogatory meaning. But what means grammatesicle?"

"Granma's testicle?" Josh grins. "Granma doesn't have a testicle. Only granpa does." He laughs too loudly.

"Josh, could you please pass me the plate of meat?"

I offer some to Mari and say. "Ever notice how often men like to tell jokes about their pricks and balls? No sense of decorum. And listen, Joshua, it's gross to laugh so hard at your own jokes. Mari, Josh said grammatically, you know, rules of grammar."

"You both upsets me, so I can't to hear you no more." Mari says.

"It's gross to chew with your mouth open, Judith," Josh says. "I'm glad it wasn't me who took the last piece."

"Oh, Josh, let's not needle each other. It's tiring. Come on. I want to tell you both something. I just know; no matter what happens, I'll always love you both as my brother and sister."

Mari sends me a knowing look. It must be disgusting to have to watch Josh and me go at each other.

"Your mama and papa must have been cruel to each other at the dinner table, Judith," Mari says.

"Why do you say that, Mari?"

"I just feel that you are repeating a pattern in your memory.

Or you wouldn't do that. You are like some kind of family I never had—where I could be as close to both you. So I don't want to hear the whining no more."

The three of us settle into our own spaces, not looking at one another.

"You know, Mari..." I pause, self-conscious about breaking the silence—her observation had hit home, "...that's very interesting about the word vulgar. How in English it means something offensive, obscene, like crude or not nice. You know, like common people are crude sometimes. I must say I'm glad I'm a liberal vegetarian. This meat is too delicious. You really are a good cook, honey."

Josh seems pleased with my compliment but Mari sends me annoyed looks. "Judith, didn't you hear me say we use the word vulgar too? But like I say, have often a positive sense for us. Depend how you use it. That last statement you say sounds pigoted to me. The common people aren't crude! Rich peoples is crude and cruel."

Josh and I have really gotten to her. "You mean bigoted, Mari," Josh corrects.

"Wait. Let me look up *vulgar* in the dictionary," I say.

"Judith is always running to the dictionary. Eat your food first, babe. Aren't you going to eat all of your potato? The only time you get into food is when you're afraid I'm cheating you. Right?"

"I'm finished. I'll save the rest of my potato for tomorrow. Where's your dictionary? Your desk needs a once-over. How can you think with it like this?"

"Judith is always saving bits of food for tomorrow," Josh says. He takes the plates to the small sink just behind the table. "Did you take a good look in the refrigerator? How many little wrapped up tidbits did you count? That's all the food she is saving for tomorrow."

"Josh, we can't all be as perfect about food as you are. Maybe I was a Central Park squirrel once. Frugality can be seen as a virtue, you know. Come on, sit down, Mari and I'll clean up. You did all the cooking. Listen, here's what the dictionary says:

Vulgar. One. Of or associated with the common people. Two. Vernacular. What does that mean? I forgot."

"It mean the language that is spoken dailys by the people of a country rather than the literary or learned language," Mari answers. "Remember to you that I have been translating English poetry for a few years now, and one of the black women's poetry I translated was written in the vernacular. The way the black peoples talk and that's very difference than writing in poet literary tradition. I know a lot about the English language from my translation work, but I just don't know yet how to speak it well."

"You do great, Mari." She must think I'm a jerk sometimes. My middle class upbringing is showing again; I was taught that common people, in other words poor people, were crude.

She looks past me, eyes wide, glistening.

"You will come with me, Judith, to the Pampa someday and you will begin to speak Spanish immediato. I promet you. You have a good listen. And that's what it takes is a good listen."

"Yes, I have a good ear, two good ears." I pull on one of my ears and on one of hers. "But, maybe my listen needs improvement."

"Do that to me too," Josh says. He tears off a chunk of Italian bread and wipes up the meat juices left on his plate before devouring it.

I pull on his ears too.

Mari must feel so lonely with Josh and me—her pose as a child fumbling with a new language is in part just that, a pose; maybe she uses it to accomodate us or to distract us from our constant bantering. She's really a brilliant clown.

"Judith, here, read the rest of the definition of vulgar." Josh gives full attention to the conversation again.

"Three. ill-bred, boorish. Four. obscene, offensive, coarse," I continue.

Josh intervenes. "I think, Judith, that those are the more common uses of the word here. Not the first two definitions you read."

"I know. I already said that."

"I tell you, it's from the Latin, *Vulgus,* the common people,"

Mari insists.

"It's amazing how desultory the order of definitions for a word seem," I comment. "Of course, we are assured the most common usage is first. But by whose research and for what purposes? I'm beginning to smell racist, sexist, and classist forces at work in lexicography."

"I comes from the common people," Mari announces, "and I am not obscene, what you say, coarse? Not nice? I am very, very nice. I am not durtie. I use toilet paper and teeth paste." Her cute grin becomes a grimace.

"Mari, forgive me. I was just speaking from bad habit to say common people are crude. It was stupid. Come on, forgive me. I see now. Vulgar means of the common people, the community, the common good. I can learn."

"Common also means widespread, as in 'common knowledge,' and 'common ground,' " Josh offers. "And let's see it also is used to mean average or standard like, "His grades were common, ordinary.'"

"Right, Josh, *his* grades were common, while *her* grades were exceptional." I pat his head.

"So Mari.... " He ignores me. "Common means ordinary, everyday, like in common sense."

"Yes, Josh," Mari replies solicitously. "But I can see that here in your middle class sectors, vulgar is used more in an oppressive, classist, put down way—mean like stupid, coarse. You people would think my Indian people is vulgar...." She looks at me. "...like ignorant, because they eat with them hands. But to me is beautiful."

"That's unfair, Mari. I love to eat with my hands and you know it. How do you say common in Spanish?"

"Comun. El comun de las gentes. The majority of the people. The average peoples."

"Judith, could you do something ordinary like make us tea before the water boils away?" asks Josh.

* * *

Julio 18 en Argentina at House of my Family

Te amo, Judith. All the birds of the Pampas sing sweet and sad today about us, about space and emptiness. About different times where Judith or Mari are crying in Foreign nights.

But I can hear also our laughs. I can hear your marimba fully of music of life. Your marimba loving me, your marimba sucking like a child from mother earth and mother sky. Your marimba playing with ferns and sweet worms and clouds and so far away stars. Your marimba and you galloping flying swimming.

I'm here to visit my family again, but I cannot work in my family house. To have a family is such a terrible thing. I love them as horrible much and I cannot do nothing for them . And guilty and impotence are coming back again, like the years ago. Now I can see somethings clearly but I cannot change the feelings, the pain.

Did I ever say to you how it was the first time I came here after to leave you when I come back from Europe. I found my father and sister waiting me at the railroad station, both of them so tender and beautiful. We embrase to each other and cried so long. When we came to the house, there was my mother, moving fast from the door to the street with a sun-yellow dress on and the big face cover with so many wrinkles. I leave the car and I run towards her and I embrase her and she embrase me and she began to scream between tears. "How different you are? What happened with your voice? Why these clothes that look like a boy? You are not my Mari." And she began to shake and I felt die. Slowly she became into herself or into the situation I do not know and at once she naked me and gave me my old clothes that she kept here from five years ago. And I stood enough docile and smiling and silent and terible frighten and so she felt and she said me that I became her daughter again.

We drank mate and we ate something and they show me all around the house that looked to me so different in those moments, there was two days that I could not sleep before to come home and I stood another two without can.

My sister so beautiful and so beloved for me and sometime so far way and maybe angry for me to have left her so long But our

closeness will grow, slow and solid I know. My relationship with my father go easy and deep. He is so close to the earth and the sky. And my mother, this her of me, this sensitive and torment woman who is pitiless with herself. Her I love and I fear, no one know how much. Only to love her while I walk the road to reaffirmate myself just like I am and I want to be more and more.

Judith, I want to tell you a small dream I had. I was walking on the street of a small village, like the village of my parents. Two women came out of a small dress shop and beckon me to come in. But I felt me resistance to go and I turn my head and your smiling face was there and you were calling to me that the carnival was here and that we could to ride on the Tiger lillies if we went right then. I walked towards you with doubt and fear but I embraced you to me and rested my head on your belly and I felt some kind of a perfect lightness like joy.

Your letter came just now to me, the letter you sent three months ago and in the pages were the beautiful winter leaves.

I send you this little picture of the beautiful pinginos, from the south of my country. They are innocent and proud and tender and holy like you. Like us. Our feelings of those first days never will to be lost. Tell Josh that my mama have a small tourtle, with purple and orange flowers on her back. Amazonas, Magdalena, Mississippi, Missouri, Hudson River all bring my love to you, Judith, and to Josh too, who I love so like my brother I never had.

Mari

BETRAYAL

"I want a mate, Judith, not a monster who spars with me."

"Mari, I think it's worse to keep things in then to get them out, don't you? You have all these wonderful poetical images in your head about romance but, you know, we have to face the reality that you can't stay here forever. And I don't see myself running to a country ruled by machine guns. Remember, I live in a democracy, supposedly. I don't think I could take being stalked day and night by guys in military uniforms."

"Who's talking about forever? You people in this country are like loco. You always have to have some insurance certificate on the future. I'm talking about now, Judith. Right now at nine o'clocks in the morning at 162 Fifth Avenue with last night's wine and incense making like beautiful images of bodies swimming in some eternal, sensual, glorious place."

"Maybe you've had a vision of the hereafter, my darling, but right now last night's wine is giving me a headache and I have to be at my job at ten o'clocks."

As I start to leave our bed, Mari grabs me in a hold tighter than any bear hug I've experienced. Her mouth is on my neck, biting and licking me like crazy. I feel the tingling in my back, then a rush of warmth between my legs; even my toes feel alerted by her passion.

"My loveliness, mi pequeña, pájarita...."

I resist her seductive love words. She knows I melt when she speaks Spanish to me—even if she's telling me I 'm a scoundrel.

"Te amo the dear, teeny, leetle hairs all over your body. I want to wash you like the mamas do with all them little babies. Judith, can't you to stay with me now? I'm still hungry for you today. You know, you fell asleep last night just when I was in some strange place of ecstasy. And I guess I'm still somewhere in that place."

"Darling Mari, I want to talk, but I also want to have some breakfast with you before I have to go off. Somebody's got to bring home the bacon."

"Okay, what you want to say me? I listen. I promet a good listen." For Mari this means licking and listening. My nipples are standing straight out like eager, young birds, stretching for nourishment.

"Damn it, Mari. I can't concentrate. I guess we better talk!"

She looks at me as if I've just whacked her. Then she shrinks into the mattress as I say, "I'm sorry, little one. I didn't mean to yell at you. I don't know, but maybe it's your obsession with me that causes a kind of terrible tension in me. You act like you're completely taken by me, but how real is it? The truth is sooner or later you're going to have to go back to Argentina. I have to protect myself. How can I let go and be with you in the way you want and need now when you're going to up and vanish soon? Maybe I am too future-oriented...." Her eyes lift towards me.

She is with me again as I go on. "Are you loving me, Mari, or just clinging to me? I know that I couldn't have done what you've done—not see my family for over four years and live with a totally different culture and language. But I can't be the one to fill the emptiness you must feel being in this country so foreign to you, this country that you see as your oppressor. At least you have to talk to me more about all the things going on inside you."

I half expect her to come out with some mysterious, quasar-philosophy, but her voice sounds sad when she says, "I never can to find the compromise between the image, the longing and the reality. Some kind of camaraderie between them that I can rest with."

"You mean like being with your beautiful images of bodies

swimming in some eternal, sensual, glorious place?"

"Yes, exactamente."

"Come on, honey. Don't be sad. We're both so hard on ourselves. That's what I mean. We've got to talk reality, our reality. Loving someone from the other side of the world is not exactly the same thing as loving someone from next door. Someone, you know, who you played mumblety-peg with at least once."

"Mumblety-peg, Judith? What can that be?"

"You never played that? That was my all-time favorite game. Maybe you did play it. I don't know what you would call it in Spanish."

"Describe to me."

"Okay, this will be a good test to see how good I can remember. You take a small knife."

"La navaja?"

"Is that a pocket knife?"

"Si."

"Okay, you take a navaja and you rest it with the blade open on different parts of your body: on your knuckles, different knuckles, your elbows, your shoulders. Then you have to flip the knife away from you there so that it sticks in the earth. And the person who doesn't get it to stick in the ground is supposed to 'mumble the peg.' That means pulls a peg out of the ground with their teeth. But we never did that part when we played."

"That sounds like so painful kind of game. Like primitive."

"No, not really. You just have to be careful and dexterous. Did you ever play a game like that?"

"No, little Mumbly. We play the more peaceful games than you people here."

"See, I told you. We didn't even grow up doing the same things. How do you expect us to tune in on the same wave length just like that?"

"We tuned in very well on the wavelength. I can still to taste you from last night. So delicioso."

"I know, but it gets harder, the more you know somebody. It takes practice, work."

"We played a game with a geometrico configuration on the

ground and a stone that you jump around called rayuela."

"That sounds like hopscotch. We play that here too, but more fun was marbles. You got to keep all the marbles you won. And God forbid if you lost your marbles." I giggle but Mari doesn't get my joke.

"Well, I think we like our little games and you like your little games, but what is it you are trying to say me, Judith?"

"I don't know exactly. I just wish you'd played marbles and mumblety-peg too, that's all. It just feels that we always have to explain everything to each other. Things can't just be, like relaxed or something. Everything to you is so intense. I mean even if you did play marbles, you'd see them all as something else. Some little objects to turn into all the animals and birds. Like those huacas you were telling Josh and me about. Sometimes things are just what they are. A marble is a marble. A knife is a what'd you say? Navaja?"

"A mumblepeg is a mumblepeg. What does a mumblepeg look like?"

"I don't know what it looks like. We never really used one. But love sometimes is what it is. Like sex is sex. Maybe that's it, Mari! Maybe that's been it all along. We're sexually attracted to each other but we're not in love. You'll go back to your country. I'll stay here and we'll write letters once a week and that's it. We'll keep reminding each other what a wonderful love affair we had together."

"That's not what I feel about you. I feel like to know something what it means to join,to—what you people say, catharte?—like for me some cataclysmic kind of togetherness I never to know before."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart." What can I say to her? She is crying. When I reach out to hold her, to comfort her, some invisible force—is it outside of me or inside, or is it around Mari, protecting her? I don't know, but that force stops me and says, 'Don't touch her. Let her cry.'

It is as if I've come upon a waterfall I've never seen before—but not really that—more like seeing a teacher who'd always served as an unquestionable source of composure and informa-

tion suddenly transform in front of me into a mass of uncertainty. I've gotten used to Mari reaching out for me eagerly, hungrily with sureness. Now she is a fountain of tears and I am not allowed to drink from the water. This fountain is just meant to be wondered at.

I finally feel compelled to nuzzle the wonderment. "Look, maybe I just have a problem, Mari, about closeness. I'm still trying to figure out who I am. Maybe I have twin-phobia—afraid of being too much like someone else and afraid of being too different. I see you as very unique. You just are. I'm terribly drawn to you. It's possible I'm afraid you'll make me invisible."

Mari looks at me as if I am speaking nonsense. "You seems to hold your own very well with others—like Josh."

"Well, that took years of practice. Besides he's a man. It's not that hard to tell who's me and who's him. He's got a penis and I've got a vagina. I'm talking about being with a woman, connecting with a woman. When I'm in love with a woman, I just naturally feel that she's a part of me. I'm learning the hard way about keeping healthy boundaries. And sometimes I end up fighting the very closeness I seek. I think that's a good way to explain it."

"That's the twin stuff you got to work through. That's not you and me."

"Probably even if you did grow up in Centerville, Ohio like I did...which you didn't and which you never would have anyway so I don't know what I'm saying except that I would still have trouble relating to you. I don't think I know yet how to get it together with someone I really feel close to like I really feel close to you. With Josh, I knew we were really different—like two different species with two different cultures. The Jew and the lesbian—survivors. So I could relax and be okay with whatever closeness we could experience. Maybe I'm just saying that men and women are so different you don't really expect the kind of closeness that you do with a woman."

"Judith, if you have to analyze so much what it is you can feel, I wonders sometime what it is really that you feel for me. I have so dear and beloved painter friend to me, Carlos. With him

I have explored some places in the mind I never can with anyone else. We have the different things with the different people. That is the beauty of the life. Do not be so worry for every little meaning."

Talking to her feels good. "I am glad we're going to have some more months together because I don't want to be tense with you. I want to mesh with you. Whether it's sexual or loving, I don't know any more. I don't want to be upset that I have to leave you in the morning and go to my job."

Mari is no longer crying. She is staring hard at me. Either she is completely absorbed in what I'm saying or hasn't heard one word. She appears to have gone into a trance.

"Mari, Mari, come back to me. What is it? What have I said now that upsets you so much? Please talk to me."

"Judith, there's something I have to say to you. I've been waiting for the right moment. Maybe now it is." The tears have dried. She is another person—confident, calm, brilliant, shining. Her sun has healed her.

I try to imagine what she will tell me. I think of the possibilities: someone is going to publish her latest poems; or she has a job with Casa de las Americas where she went for an interview the week before. It has to be something good because her depression is gone. And it can't have anything to do with us because the anxiety lines have disappeared from her forehead.

"Mari, what is it? I'm a captive audience. Tell me the good news and then let's get some breakfast. I don't want to be late for work the third morning in a row."

"I'm leaving for Europe in two weeks. I'll be heading right for Paris. The people there I knew from Argentina have contacted me so I know I have the compatible people to stay with. I'm going to find the European blood in me. It's like the missing link that has kept an invisible specter dancing on my head. There are so many Latino-American artists who have escaped the regime and yet are still to keeping them souls and their work together in some place because they can't to live in our country. And I want to know their stories and to take them on with me."

I am stunned. I am shocked. I am speechless, yet I speak.

"Mari, you can't go. I just fixed up a desk for us, for you to write at. We're just getting close. It's like a betrayal of our love, our new love. I'm just learning how to except that you're from another planet from me but that's okay. And Josh loves you. You've become his best friend. What about the talks you two have together? What about us, Mari? What about us?"

Mari doesn't respond. She just keeps looking straight ahead like an arrow knowing where it's going next even though it's suspended for a moment in its flight. Through my own tears I watch the arrow disappear.

* * *

Two week go by; I can't tell whether two minutes or two decades vanish. I don't know whether to touch Mari or ignore her. She is some person already in my past. We talk and we make love during that time at least once. I try ploys to get her to stay. My mind is a jumble of accusations, well-wishes, profound analyses meant to numb all of the swirling emotions inside.

The idea does occur to me to go with her. In fact, she suggests it. But that means quitting my job; I have three more months to go before I will be eligible again for unemployment as I am a kind of seasonal typesetter for a publishing company. I guess I have my own method of survival so I can compose music and write. It would be a luxury for me to run off with her. Besides I have puritanical blood in me.

I can't be like her. I can't just take off like that and have an adventure. I have to have some kind of security. I can't run down to 5th Avenue and panhandle enough change for a bag of groceries in exactly one half hour like she can—I timed her once. I can't go up to perfect strangers and have them invite me to visit them in their homes like she can. I can't buy somebody else a cup of coffee without knowing who they are like she can.

I can't believe that now I am the same person who only three weeks before was completely clear about the fact that we would have to leave each other and that no amount of togetherness or compromise could change that fact. I was sure we were both destined to make waves in the bloodstreams of our respective countries. We had no choice but to follow our separate paths or

roads as she liked to call them. Neither of us, not even for the Lesbian Archives' Book of Records, has been prepared to dig up our family roots and transplant them to the other's hemisphere.

But Europe? Mari going off to Europe? What sense does that make? That feels like a luxury in this process of root gathering. It is enough for me to deal with North America and South America. Now she is bringing the whole of Europe into our relationship as well.

For the first time with Mari I feel definitely a provincial. I feel like maybe there is something to this bit about sticking to someone from your own neighborhood. Now all those flowers I've noted that break through cement, performing the impossible to survive, seem like miracles Mari and I will never imitate. It takes a long time to affirm a new reality, and we're not giving it a chance.

I disentangle myself from this emotional trauma long enough to wave good-bye to her but later, I hardly remember the dinner at an Argentinian restaurant on Forty-sixth Street with Josh and his friend, Saul. The three of them were laughing easily together and stuffing themselves with her favorite Argentinian dishes. The wine felt like acid to me and the food like bits chafing against the tight knot of my stomach.

While Josh and Saul banter with her over survival techniques—how could they have not notice the depth of my pain?—I tiptoe further into myself, analyzing how her movements in and out of my life challenge my existence. Is my connection to her, similar to the immediate bond between trapeze partners—one faulty step by either acrobat and both plummet into another dimension?

I think of the deaf woman I have seen "listening" to a musician play in the village. She places her fingertips on the sounding board of his guitar, absorbing the plucked notes into her body. I feel that only the listening hands of a mute person could 'hear' the melody of my love song for Mari. But then I can't hear the melody of my own love song; I love dumbly.

We are still sipping black coffee, taking in spoonfuls of custard, when suddenly she takes off in the springtime for Paris. I

will not be there to watch her smell roses in the Tuilleries or eat croissants on the Boulevard St. Germain. Here we are, new lovers, but we are separating.

She always maps out an escape route when she enters a new place or situation. The fact is, she purchased an airplane ticket the day after she came to stay with me. She had told herself if it went well she'd stay, if not, she'd leave. That put the burden of proof all on me. I guess I don't match the images she had sewn in her heart. How is she going to reconcile love affairs with her root-gathering business anyway?

And I have been feeling guilty towards her! She can't promise me a rose garden either. She does have her road. She does know how to take care of herself. She knows both how to stick to a challenging situation and how to flee an unpleasant one. She is scorpion; she is fox. She is alacran; she is zorra. And I am the abandoned lover left to pick up her discarded passions strewn on my bed.

* * *

In the danker cellars of my mind a monster twinship still lurks. This pair holds one key to Christian thought. Jesus, the gentle, the holy, is twinned forever to Judas, the nervous, the betrayer. Without Judas, Jesus, Superstar of Human Suffering, would not have been dutifully nailed and elevated over centuries of altars.

I long for the deaths of betrayers and crucified heroes. I await the revival of enchanting trios, like the Three Graces who swirl in the delirious dance of owning and not betraying their own feelings—each of them allowing that to happen in the others.

"Hello, Judith?"

"Who is this? I can't hear you. There's a radio in the phone."

"I'm sorry I missed our birthday. You missed our birthday, too."

"Meredith, is that you?"

"That's what my husband calls me. Is something wrong with your voice? It sounds strange, deeper."

"I'm going through a sex change."

"What? I can't hear you. Wait a minute, I'll call you back. Now that we know who we are let's try it again. Hang up, okay?"

I can't believe my twin, my sister Meredith, is calling me. We haven't called each other since she visited Josh and me at our loft on Prince Street and she got so upset because we were using cushions to sit on instead of chairs. I don't think we had much furniture. Letters, holiday, and birthday cards kept a line of communication between us, not to mention my birthday presents to her and her kids. But we rarely called.

"Hi again. I'm here." Meredith's voice is lighter, more clipped than mine.

"That's better. I can hear you clearly," I say, trying to lighten my voice. I don't want to sound strange to her. "I can't believe you're calling me. Is something wrong?"

"No, everything's fine."

"How's everybody? How are the boys?"

"Oh, they're just great. Mario's going to Poly Tech in the fall. He's going to be a chemist like Father."

"Oh, that's nice."

"And Sal wants to be a musician. Maybe he takes after you. He plays in the school band, the orchestra and he's got his own dance band going. They play at all the Italian street fairs in the city. "

"That's really terrific, Meredith."

"You didn't ask me about Rico."

"How's Rico?"

"If you really want to know—he's the same, but worse. I don't know, but I think he's going through a mid-life crisis. He's turning into a 70s hippie. I mean I thought it was great when he wanted to stop being a surgeon and go into creating database systems for emergency rooms. I mean that made sense. Now he's a consultant for some kind of medical firm which means he stays at home and putters around the house."

"Maybe there isn't anything wrong with that, Meredith. Maybe you should change some of your ideas about what a husband is supposed to do and what a wife is supposed to do. We're all people going through a lot of changes. Try not to worry too much."

"You have to plan when you have kids, Judith. But you wouldn't know about that."

"Listen, I worry a lot about other people. How's your work going?"

"My boss is great. But how long can I keep designing cheerful ads for Supreme Meat Products when I'm going off meat. I think all the chemicals they inject into the cattle kill us."

"It sounds like you've become political, a little bit, Meredith?"

"No, just smart. So how are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine. I'm getting ready to go on a music tour."

"By yourself?"

"Oh, no. A friend and I are touring the east coast together. We're leaving next week. She plays the sax. It sounds great with the marimba."

"You're not taking our marimba are you, Judith?"

"As a matter of fact, yes, I am."

"That's still half mine you know."

"You had it for a long time, for years. It was my turn."

"I'm just kidding, don't worry. Okay, well, I've got to go; my family needs me. Mama Marchetti and I are planning a birthday party for Mari."

My heart misses a beat. "For whom?" Hearing Meredith say her name instantly makes me feel the pain of our separation again.

"For Mari, Mario—Mari is what Mama Marchetta calls him. He's eighteen this month. Don't you remember his birthday is in the same month as ours?"

"I have a friend called Mari too," I manage weakly. I want to pour out my pain, say she has left me to go to Europe; I bite my lip and let Meredith talk.

"I guess there are a lot of Marios in New York. Don't you have a Mario Cuomo in your state politics? I've heard of him. Rico's a democrat and now I've become one."

"Never mind, Meredith. So thanks for calling and telling me your news."

"Sure thing. One of these years I'll scrounge up some money and come to New York again, see a Broadway musical."

"That would be great. By the way, my house is cleaner these

days. So let me know when you can come and I'll get tickets for something."

"And have a great tour, playing *our* marimba. Bye now."

"Thanks for calling, Meredith."

"Later alligator. Oh, by the way, I just want to tell you, I miss not seeing Josh anymore. That's all, bye."

* * *

Leslie transports me with her sax. She inspires my singing. Her wide range, both tonally and melodically, invites improvisation. Her rhythms are familiar to me. We share a common culture; she was born and raised in New England. Of course, there are regional differences, but if I ask, "Gee, I wonder whatever happened to the Painted Women's Ritual Theater," she knows what I am talking about. We hit it off so well musically we decide to do an August concert tour together. I am on the off part of my seasonal book production job—free to move about.

We are traveling minstrels. A friend's apartment in Cambridge serves as home base. We gig in small clubs, churches, and women's centers throughout New England, stay either with friends or camp out to save money. We pick up another musician or two to play with us along the way.

One of our best concerts takes place in an old part of Cambridge where narrow streets, dotted with respectable tourists, twist around quaint, important buildings. Our local grapevine has informed us that chances for playing here are very good; liberal churches rent out space for modern and innovative types of music.

We begin the Saturday night concert, attended by about a hundred and fifty people most of whom were women from the community, with a chant: "We come dance-a-ling. We drum, hear us sing, our music. We come, hear us bring. We strum, hear it ring, your music." The chant ends with a recitation of the names of many women classical composers and the names of their compositions.

Leslie then dresses up on stage as Bach might have for a concert and begins playing a two-part invention on the piano.

Simultaneously, I climb onto a spot-lighted table and begin to do a belly dance. Michelle, the drummer, fingers intricate rhythms on her three conga drums. Before long the music takes on a jazz-like form.

Suddenly Michelle starts singing something like, "Bah, Bah, Bach, if you only knew. What a power trip they've made out of you." I jump off the table, pick up my marimba sticks and improvise with the others. When we all begin cackling and directing our attention to the grotesque shapes above us, the surrealness of the scene catches everyone's attention and soon the sanctuary is filled with laughter and stomping feet. The cathartic quality of this piece makes way for a gentler, deeper space in which we play our original songs.

Leslie ripples on her sax, I gallivant up and down the rosewood marimba keys and Michelle plucks and picks her guitar strings for one and a half hours.

By the time we arrive at our last song, one created by the three of us, the crowd is on it s feet, not to applaud us as much as to applaud itself. Leslie ends up behind our magic curtain, a shadow screen, where she images herself as a great black bird, soaring and encircling us all. She seems ecstatic. I leap all over the space, singing, "Ah, Women," again and again.

Afterwards in the Good Goddess bar in Boston, Leslie and I stroll around and around the dance floor like newborn leprechauns, mapping out our next concert. Michelle won't be able to join us as she is joining a group of clam-diggers for the week in Provincetown.

"Are you asleep?"

I don't answer her.

"Judith, are you asleep?"

The bed rocks as Leslie turns over, away from me. Damn, now she thinks I am asleep.

"Yes, I'm asleep," I say in a hardly audible voice. "But I'm not all that asleep."

The bed moves again as she turns back to me.

"You mean all that dancing at the bar didn't relax you?"

"It got me tired out, that's for sure. But it didn't get rid of my tension." I want to say 'horniness,' but I am not going to come on to her. Fuck, why am I being so careful? Maybe I should tell her I've decided it would not be good for us to be lovers. And if she doesn't want to be lovers?

"I'm afraid of you, she says." Have I heard her right? "Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes. What's there to be afraid of?"

The night before I had massaged her. It had relaxed us both. We have a good working relationship; it had to be kept that way.

"Because I'm attracted to you."

The words sound funny—*attracted to you.* Am I emitting some unusual odor? But the feeling which arises in me feels wonderful.

"I've done it before." My voice seems harsh.

There is a pause, then, "I have too."

"I didn't mean I've done *it* before. What I mean is, I've decided not to do it with someone I'm attracted to before. I've done *that* before."

"Oh, I thought you meant...." She stops short.

No words come to me either.

"I want to hold you, but I restrain myself," she says.

Okay, now tell her again how a working relationship can get fucked up by this kind of thing. Is she asking me for some direction?

"I want you too, Leslie. But you see it wouldn't be good for us. Believe me. I speak from experience."

"Is there someone else, Judith?"

I don't answer.

Why is she moving towards me, touching my arm?

"Then let me."

"Let you?" I go weak, queasy. Her arms are around me. Her weight presses down on me. This isn't what I mean at all. I wrap my arms around her.

"Perhaps," she says, "It will be easier this way."

"At least," I say as our lips touch, "it will be more fun."

In the morning a letter arrives from Mari, forwarded by Josh from New York City. Mari will be back in New York soon; her six month stay in Europe is coming to an end.

Paris Monday 18 March

Ma petite Judith. My douce, strong, luminosa, Judith. I come back from l'Alliance at noon, walking by le Boulevard Raspail, without stop in the cafe of Boulevard Montparnase, walking by le rue Gassendi along the dark cemetery of Montparnase, under the rain, the thin rain that fell all the time here, under the naked trees. Walking soon to my house because today I was waiting your letter. But no, no still. Sure tomorrow it will come. I begin to write you now, so I prepare the space for our letter of tomorrow, like you prepared a space for me in your little studio times ago.

It's very strange, but now I can perceive how much I wake up as feminist in the past months in New York. I had long discussions with the few women and men with who I talked these last weeks. They support to me in many ways, but the men who belong to the Marxist-Latino-American-Intelligentsia sustain that is necessary to take the power first, and only then, under the proletarian government will be possible to work for the liberation of the women. Before revolution there will be energy loss between the members of the revolutionary vanguard that will provoke division and antagonism inside the proletarian class, inside the "proletarian couple," as Leon said.

But now all begins to be so clear for me. And I want to tell you that the process of liberation of the women will be not before or after the proletarian class take over the power; it will be during, along with the struggle for to take power and for to organize a new society. In the colonized countries like my country, the work will be inside the revolutionary vanguard whose values, attitudes and praxis would reflect in the inward life of the group certain correspondence with the future society they begin to build, like the embryo of a future body. A false concept of unity would cause the loss of the creative revolutionary energy of this social group, the women.

To work with the proletarian woman towards her own awak-

ening of conscience about her situation, her droits, her herstory and her role inside the liberation's processes of herself, her class, her country and all the human beings will win the force of the militant woman with the natural tensions that a revolutionary process imply. So that a woman that once only "followed" her husband or father or brother or lover can become an authentic and self-conscious militant.

Even those with reformist characteristics will help in some ways, because the woman will begin to see her closer oppressor, father, husband, boyfriend. She will have more possibility of amplifying her vision and to see the power the dominant class have over her and also to see the working man who is victim and murderer at the same time. This will be so much the difficult struggle for the woman.

Can you excuse me? I know that you know almost all this but I want to tell you in my analytic way because all this have a deep relationship with our affective relationship because I learn so much from you and from other women in your country.

I'm living a high intellectual creative period. I'm sleeping only 3 or 4 hours each day but I'm not tired. I have passionate lectures, discussion, contradictions in the road of to become a Latino-American feminist Marxist. Like in the kindergarten I begin to learn to be a woman, WOMAN. And now this woman begin to write about her—they in singular and plural over the world which she identificate more herself. Latino-America, Africa, Vietnam. but I learned to see so much in USA. I'm to see so much in Europe. I will learn to see terrible much always at each place where I will go.

I'm reading Kolontai, Engles, M'Rabet, Reed, Millet, Bachoffen, Rowbotham and so many others and pamphlets and collections of articles about the woman in Argentina and the Program of Transition of Trotsky and jumping under the trees the sun the petitefou birds and meetings and long long sweet dreams with you.

Next Friday I will read poems at Cuba House in the campus with other Latino-American poets youth and Saturday Argentine Trotskyists will give a talk about Argentine political situations

and my little room more beautiful each day and my children that I keep growing and me loving you and the miracle of life.

I understand the situation that you tell me about what happen when you sang your translations of Sappho's poems. I can to see both faces. The women who left because you used the translations of your man friend, Theodoros. And the right of him to read the poems because of his love for the poems and his dedicated work to translate the poem—because all human creation is for all the human being and because we work and fight for a society without class, race, sexual descrimination.

I know that these women need so much a culture that they create themselves. And I understand when you say that some of these women go to the Mafia run clubs at same time and I think that the problem is that we don't to see clearly the origin of the woman oppression and exploitation and to elaborate the vision of the women's struggle integrated with the vast class's struggle. Because there is not women's liberations without socialist revolutions and there is not socialist revolutions without women's liberations.

I will write each day more like a woman, about women and for women, but also for men. The day will comes that we will be all sisters and brothers in the grand communist human community, and I want to work for it.

And I clean my teeths all the nights and I undress myself and I go to the bed with a terrible empty space between my arms. But each morning I hug the trees for you and for me and I ask them when will begin the spring. Then they answer me, "Don't worry. Her spring always begins again."

I'm writing again, working over poems that I begin to write in New York and working in little notes in my new European Journal.

I met three days ago a Latino-American poet that I wanted to know so much in the past. He is a nice person, very famous for here, so non-political anarchist. Of course we don't have political concordance, but we can to talk about many things.

Say to Josh that I love him so much. I miss him and our conversations and the soups and Watergate and the little plays that

he made for us and him clear, beautiful face. A strong embrace for Saul, who I love so much. He is like the tongue of your language for me. A so generous person and of course I feel so close to him because he know my language like a landscape of him own.

I would like kiss you on the top of your nose, my wild spirit. Judith who make me happy-unhappy.

I see a red point some times and seem like some sound from my guitar. I afraid again to become crazy. Little deformations and strange events which I cant to recount now. Listen I love you terrible much but I suffered at New York like here now. Qu'est que c'est? Que'est que c'est? I saw you singing so beautiful in the lesbian demonstration in the video of Luisa and Nora. There are two days that I don't talk a word with nobody.

If I could embrace you now all would become quiet and real again. I want to eat the lobe of your ear. Thanks for the songs of Violetta Para. Some day I will can play it with your help.

Yesterday I played for hours my guitar. She come to meet me in the space of my solitude. There where only the love or sometime the words come. I was waiting years for her and she come from you because you teach me not to be afraid of her.

Tomorrow I will go to look for some job. To keep children one day for week. $6 dollar, nothing for day and I will begin in l'Alliance again. Here the death of Pompidou opened a funny political landscape full of activity.

Finally I received letter from my mother talking about my return that I anticipated from her. And I'm so frightened so now I need to write her to clarify many things.

I would like that you, Josh and Saul meet for to eat bean stew and Portuguese wine and to read my poems and letters and to talk about me. Pardon I know that is too much, but I miss the little, dirty, magnificent people that all you are. I give you my lucidity and my madness and the little things of my life. And I give you the word, slender, that I like so much and I give you the greenness of my onion plant and I give you the house of my body with the little but faithful fire that it keep. Always for you my mornings shine.

And I see you later, hermanita. I need to stop now or never I will send this letter. But I will begin to write you another next hour when I will come back from the post office.

My child lover, tell me all about your performances. I would like so much to be there and to see you. Are you becoming a lover with some other? It would hurt me so much. Tell me that you understand and that you wait for me until August. I'll be back to you around that time. Please keep me as your closest person until I can to find my way back to my homeland. Tell me that you love me like I love you.

Chou, Mari

* * *

Mari returns from France at the same time Leslie and I return to New York City. All the work I am doing to keep myself centered seems futile. In the presence of these two women, I, who have worked so hard to join flesh and spirit, feel my body and soul separate. As my body clings to Leslie, my present physical lover, my soul flies to Mari, my spiritual lover.

When I try to integrate myself by dressing Mari in feathers and scarves, begging her to join Leslie and me on stage, she rebels.

New York City's harsh and competitive atmosphere does not help gentle these awkward times. Leslie's and my blossoming musical career quickly dies. The last concerts are devoid of spontaneity and excitement. The creative aspects are crushed in the pressure to make saleable products. Though Leslie is challenged by the competitive atmosphere, I am exhausted by it. While she tosses her head back and snorts before beginning to play, I turn inward, almost hiding behind the marimba.

Our last concert should not happen. Luckily many people who might have come escape the city on the hot, Saturday afternoon. The small gallery room is not air conditioned and you can see programs waving unenergetically throughout the space like small, limp flags. These tiny movements forewarn the gust about to erupt on stage.

Leslie and I haven't talked real to each other since Mari's return. I am still hoping to juggle both relationships. But the fact is

they are both heading for crash landings. I should know a disaster is coming when Leslie drops her sax case before the performance on the pavement in front of the gallery in Soho, then stares at me accusingly. "Why did you make me do that, Judith?" she shouts. Flames consume her love for me.

As we force our way through the program our voices sound harsh, accompaniments off. Concentration is impossible. She stomps through her numbers and honks like a mad goose, while I rap on the wooden keys, scattering broken phrases all over the stage. Where are the liquid sax sounds, my earthy marimba rolls? That she has smoked grass all afternoon and I have downed several glasses of wine serves only to make us even less in touch with our music.

When our musical numbers end, and the audience is clapping politely, I can no longer contain the tension that has built up inside me. I go off like a jack hammer. I throw my sticks down and stomp to back-center stage. Too bad we aren't into wrecking our instruments like so many rock stars are. We would get out our feelings without anyone knowing it.

I had set up a silk curtain for the concert upon which to project a revolving circle of colors. Now using this curtain both as shadow screen and backdrop, I pour my emotions into body movements. First, I pantomime a ferocious and cruel Leslie. After stepping behind the screen again, I appear from the other side as myself, imaged as overwhelmed and victimized. For my third act, I walk through the cloth and attempt to be two people groping for a dialogue.

I must simulate a marionette frantically looking for her personality. Nobody applauds my encore. Only hanging mouths, blinking eyes, greet me. Leslie is shocked. She sees me as committing terrible injustice to her music. Thank god Mari isn't here!

When it is all over, neither of us speaks to anyone. She runs out quickly, disappearing into the murky fumes of a hot city night. I put my instruments into a taxi and rush to her apartment building on the Upper East Side. I really want to drive off the 12th Street pier. After I put my instruments in the lobby, I run to her door which is just closing and wedge my foot in the crack.

Lucky I have my boots on.

I am slapped with words, "You are wasting your time. Nobody ever does that in my concerts."

"We better talk, Leslie," I say in a matronly manner, watching the crack in the door get smaller. "We never should have played this afternoon. We haven't talked enough and look what happens when we don't. Furthermore, I don't believe that you aren't jealous about Mari!"

By charging into our fragile musical space and performing an exorcism at her as well as my own expense, I feel that somehow, almost obligingly, I am giving her a perfect opportunity to punish me for loving Mari. Am I incorporating these two women in an old pattern—once again giving my twin, Meredith a chance to punish me for being close to my mother-lover? Though Leslie has once said it was fine that I love Mari as well as her, obviously that is not so. Otherwise, why had Leslie stopped talking to me way before the concert?

Earlier, she confided to me that her parents had pampered her brother into Yale, while encouraging her to think of music as a hobby. So she was not supported, either economically or emotionally, by them to study music formally. At the least, our summer together has given me creative companionship and bolstered her faith in herself, enough to eventually go back to school and get a degree in the sax.

After I force the door open, I follow her into the apartment. She charges into the room where July, her daughter, is reading and flicks out the light. I hear her ordering July to go to sleep immediately though it is only 6:00.

When she comes out to the living room, I beg again that we talk.

She does not respond, but goes to the telephone and calls up her friend Gail to discuss the afternoon's events. "She's nuts," Leslie whispers in a very loud voice. "She was drunk and made a fool out of herself. I think she really is a witch!"

The room blurs in front of me. I am already remembering how Leslie's lips curled when she said my name. I am already remembering the placement of the furniture in her room.

She hangs up the receiver and glares at me. I think how ugly she seems, and she has never seemed ugly before. "You better go. I don't want to have to kick you out," she demands.

She is ruthless and I am going to fight back. She gathers things of mine I've left in the house and starts throwing them out on the sidewalk. When she throws a small antique guitar from my grandmother out the door and I hear it bounce on the cement, I stomp up to her and take a swing at her jaw.

"Nobody has ever hit me before and you have the audacity to do it in front of my child," she shouts, flailing her arms at me, though her child is sound asleep in the apartment. By now she has thrown all of my belongings out the door. I'll never forget the look an elderly woman shot at us as she swept by, pulled in the steaming early evening air by a small yapping dog with a ribbon tied on its tail. I can't believe this is happening to me either. This is the end of my relationship with Leslie.

* * *

Mari cannot comfort me. She has her own pain about the situation. She knows the score because I wrote to her about Leslie. Monogamy or non-monogamy could no longer be even an argument between us; I had become lovers with another.

We try to sleep in my studio, side by side on the couch, but she won't hold me or let me hold her. There seemed to be no resting place. Even the fact that I have told her the truth does not ease the situation. Her hurt over my actions culminates in a threat to jump off the roof.

For days she sits at a small table in the bathroom, staring at a photo of Margarita, her old friend, who had killed herself. Margarita, in her 40 s, became a famous Argentinian poet. Mari has read me excerpts from her long visionary poems. Her disturbing, surreal imagery actually chronicled real, brutal events taking place in that country—the disappearance of thousands of Argentinians without a trace.

One poem is about the women who came to be known as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They met every Thursday in a central plaza in Buenos Aires to decry the sudden disappear-

ances of their loved ones into the generals' prisons and their subsequent torture and often murder. The women gathered faithfully once a week, wearing white scarfs and carrying the photographs of their missing loved ones. She described how the square, the Plaza de Mayo in front of the Casa Rosada which houses the military, takes on apocalyptic dimensions as the women wail their urgent demands that this terrible outrage be stopped.

I think of my experience on the Lesbian Boat Ride—being surrounded by hundreds of womens' bodies, but in a pleasurable situation.

Margarita described the meshing of thousands of women in this one square to share, not enjoyment, but grief. Imagine the terrible impotence and injustice one feels to have one's own government snatch up, murder, mutilate family members who are voicing their right to live within a just and humane system. The images she created of these women enduring as well as exploding their anger, their horror, left me with a new understanding of the power of the life force. Surely the real collaboration of women giving witness to their will and power would serve to generate the strength to eliminate the junta regime.

Mari will not let me look at the photo of her poet of truth.

One night as I try to find some rest from the tension between us, I hear disconcerting footsteps on the roof above me. Instinctively, immediately, I know it is Mari. I flash upon her teetering on the edge of the roof, six floors above Fifth Avenue. It is the kind of act I can see Mari performing. Those footsteps will always echo in my memory.

I am on the roof without consciousness of how I got there. Never have I moved so fast in my life and then so slowly. Mari isn't one to be grabbed; she might react and really jump by mistake. I move so she won't know I am moving, with the slowness of the moon circling the earth. When she is mine, I lock her in my arms, imagining them as strong as steel clamps.

I lead her to the roof door and down the steps to the hallway.

Luckily Josh is in his studio which is next to mine. Although

he cannot always be there to support me when my lovers threaten to jump away from me, this night he is. A welcoming beam of light issues from his open doorway.

"What's going on with you two?" he calls out. He always senses when something is not right with me. But I know if I tell him that Mari had threatened to jump off the roof she will never forgive me. This event was just between her and me.

"Mari's not feeling well, Josh," I say. "Help me convince her to lie down for a while." He comes to her and hugs her hard. "Come into my place, Mari. I'll hot some tea and you can have some crackets and jamble." He speaks her English. She relaxes as he coddles her and we both walk her into his room.

I cook a special meal for her. I want her to be happy with me again. I make her a Josh dinner—rare steak, a well-seasoned vegetable, some slender hash brown potatoes. She relaxes into the blue-cushioned chair, looks about the familiar room and finds again a remnant of that trust she had once let blossom for me. She tells me the more difficult aspects of her search for roots in Paris. She reconstructs what happened there when she went to Le Libre des Mademoiselles Joyeaus one evening. She describes the excitement that fluttered around Claire Desmonde, the lesbian writer celebré who was reading that night—Mari just happened to be passing by the bookstore with her new friend, the Latino-American poet who was 'so beautiful a poet and so removed from the politics,' the same friend she had written to me about. I listen to the nuances and innuendoes of these interchanges.

She tells me how Claire's eyes stung her cheeks like cold snowflakes—how the coldness of the flakes aroused her. "Lashes from sharp whips make horses cry out," she says. Brutal imagery permeated the stuffy bookstore and acted on Mari like a stimulant. She couldn't resist the woman's spell.

She knew how violence erupts when passions are harnessed to serve laws and not love. Her own natural feelings had been repressed by the strict Catholic teachings in childhood, teachings which paradoxically were conveyed through sensual, exciting rituals. The woman incanting in front of her was igniting that

potent mixture of repression and violence by describing acts of sado-masochism between women.

Mari was simultaneously repelled and attracted by this display. She herself was still in the process of transforming the powerful hold these early teachings had for her. The old violence between her and her mother was stirred. Her mother's struggle to control her daughter's being was mirrored in the shocking imagery of lesbian bodies being devoured by lovers. Her cheeks flushed. The long careful dialogues on women's political roles seemed far away. Cold flakes tattooed stars on Mari's eyelids.

After the grand poet dismissed her consorts one by one with a stylish embrace, a flaunting look, a calculated word or promise, she asked Mari to go home with her. Mari did. She was hypnotized. She was not herself. She was going to learn something.

At the woman's house, in the presence of candlelight, the heavy atmosphere of incense, Mari's tears were drawn. Together they performed a ceremony. The wounds which the woman's words had opened in Mari were now swabbed with Mari's own tears. Then when the woman smiled, snow from her eyes melted and cooled the wounds. She aggressed upon Mari's body. Her tongue drew new blood from the unhealed hurts. Mari felt the blood of herself and the blood of her beloved Jesus flow out of her. She wrapped a shawl of blood around the body of her confessor, her torturer, her healer, Claire Desmonde. Together they said a prayer for wholeness.

Mari woke up the next morning alone in a strange house; mosaic designs from the bathroom floor were imprinted in her skin. When she left the house she retraced her steps back to the bookstore and asked questions. Claire Desmonde had not read at the bookstore they said. There had been no poetry reading there the night before.

She went back to her rented room on La Rue Gassendi and slept for two days.

"She must have drugged you, Mari. This sounds like hallucinations."

"Who? What she? I couldn't to find a trace of her."

"Well, what about the friend who took you to the bookstore?"

"He didn't want to go in. Like some kind of intimidation of the lesbian circle for him. I said I would meet him later."

"Did he see posters in the windows advertising a poetry reading with her name?"

"He said there was only a display of the current Marxist thought in the literary circles of Paris."

"Mari, you must have dreamt this."

"No. Three days after it happened I still had red lines all over my body."

"Maybe some guy did it to you. Drugged you at the bookstore. Did you smoke anything with your friend before the reading? Somebody put a narcotic in something you drank, then took you to somebody's house and assaulted you. A woman wouldn't do that, would she? Is there a poet named Claire Desmonde in Paris now?"

"There is. You people will hear about her here soon. She is a so fameuse lesbian there with a constant circle of women around her. I went to look for her but the people at her house said she was traveling abroad."

"What do you remember about the sexual stuff? Did you really enjoy it? Did you respond?"

"I feel I was completely taken over by some terrible force. That this woman's will was devouring me and I couldn't to stop her. When I woke up, I found a panuelo, what you say, a kerchief? tied around my wrist with the initials CD on it. It happened. But maybe another time zone, another space. She had the more power over me than anyone I've ever experienced. Whatever she want me to do I would have done. It was like my own constructs, my images were consumed in her eyes of cold fire. I was burnt up in desire for her. Something like that. The anchoring place for me was you, Judith. The love you hold me. I kept to say your name over and over to keep me. I couldn't have escaped from her intensity except for memory of you, Judith. Your face of New York like some kind of mooring place for me."

"I just don't understand, Mari. It all sounds like some kind of fantastic fabrication."

"For me it was the true, Judith. Even if somehow I did imagine some of it."

When Mari fell into my lap, an avalanche of tears, I was ready for her. I cradled her. "It's all right, sweetheart. It's really all right. However it happened, it did happen. And it's alright to feel passion for more than one person at the same time, too. Whatever you feel, it's okay. After all, we do come out of two people who in turn each come out of two. They in turn have come out of two more each, and on and on.... We should just be careful to love people who are good to us."

It was wonderful to have Mari relax with me and to hear her laugh again. I said, "Whoever decided we were to love just one person at a time, passionately, must have been a sadist." I couldn't hold back a deep sigh.

She looks up at me from the crib of my arms with such thankfulness. At last we can share a long moment of peacefulness. Maybe someday she will forgive me for becoming lovers with Leslie when she was away.

* * *

That night I have anxious dreams about my sister, Meredith, going back to a time we liked the same boy, Billy. Meredith made me give him a note from her at the movies. I gave it to him, but I also told him that I liked him too. It turned out that he liked me more than my sister. I had never been able to tell my sister this.

In my dream Meredith tells me that Billy has a collection of rabbit tails; he traps wild rabbits and cuts off their tails for his collection. She decides she doesn't really like him that much and that she doesn't care if he likes me more than her.

I also dream I am in my twin crib. But I can't rest there, for some large man—perhaps my brother, perhaps my father or another man I don't know—pulls on my feet to tease me.

"Meredith. Meredith. Don't let him do that?" I cry out.

Mari reaches across to me and strokes my head. "What's the matter, Judith? It's okay." She cradles me the rest of that night and I hold her too. The coldness between us begins to disappear. Relaxed in her arms I tell her about my nightmare. I tell her other

things that my mother has told me: that Meredith came out ten minutes ahead of me, howling and robust. I was somewhat smaller, more timid. We were not identical.

Both Mother and her doctor knew that more than one heart beat in her belly, more than two arms and two legs thrashed about in her womb. But, unbelievably, neither talked about it to the other or to anyone else. Both were afraid to discover she might be carrying an aberration. We were basically healthy babies but I did not want to come out easily. She said the doctors had to stretch her and then one reached in and literally pulled me out by the feet.

Mari and I wonder then if maybe I have dreamt myself back into my mother's womb. That the pulling on my feet was done by the doctor who was forcing me out of my safe home into a world I was not yet ready to face.

Mari never mentions suicide again but she moves to Staten Island to Lee's house. After that, we don't make love for a few weeks. We put our minds to thinking of some kind of work we can do together until she goes back to her country.

* * *

When do we take that long walk, that time she catches the balloon and when it breaks she cries so terribly? The time we talked about betrayal and she tells me clearly for the first time how she felt betrayed by me for being with Leslie.

I remember now; it was not when she came back from Paris, not when she felt the hurt most strongly, but only a few weeks ago. It took Mari over three years to tell me directly that she felt I had betrayed her.

Her English is noticeably correct. Her breasts rise and settle as we step into the busy street. She is the same height as my mother, an inch shorter than I. When I press my arm against her right breast I feel myself relax. She does not trot as much as she used to, but moves solidly along the street, at home with the earth, or in this case, the cement. When we reach the other side of the street, we look at each other and smile.

We are talking about Dove, my latest lover. She says, "Why couldn't you stay together? Does it bother you to tell me?"

I say, "You know its hard to have room inside for someone new when you're still filled with your past loves."

"Be specific for me please, Judith."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I wasn't ready to take on a new lover. And especially someone who judged me all the time. But I was lonely. Dove bore into my privacy in a very uncomfortable way. My stomach hurt the whole time I was with her." I am aware of my halting voice; funny, I don't hesitate when I sing. "I mean it just wasn't right for me."

"So why did you live with her at all?" Her question seems more like a statement.

"After you went back to Argentina, Mari, and after I sublet my apartment and moved away from Josh, I really needed to get to know myself again. But that's when I met Dove."

"I got a letter saying you and she were going to move out of the city together. Then I didn't hear from you for a long time. That's when I was hiding with my compañeras in the apartment building outside of Buenos Aires. No mail got through to us. Hey! Judith, watch out. The lights are there for a reason."

I had started to cross Park Avenue against the light, causing a car to swerve and several to honk. One young woman driver screamed at me and gave me the finger.

"I'm really sorry," I call out but the driver is already gone. "Mari, could we sit on a bench by the park for a minute? I need to catch my breath."

We sit down. A young girl walking by tries desperately to blow a bubble. Her cheeks pop out with her effort. In complete frustration she spits a wad of gum the size of a golfball onto the sidewalk then runs to catch up to her mother who scolds her and smiles at us. Together they walk into one of the expensive apartment buildings framing the park. We can't go into the park; there is a locked gate around it.

I rest my hand on Mari's lap. "What were we saying? No, I didn't know about that. At least not until way after the fact. I didn't hear from you for three months. I wrote to your parents

and to your friend, Carlos to find you. They didn't answer me. I was so frustrated. So worried. I had no choice but to find you in my own way. Didn't I tell you about the long meditation I did where I got the message that you were with Estella? I told you that, I'm sure."

"Yes, I remembers, Judith. But first tell me about Dove and you."

A mist surrounds the park today, making the trees, the flowers, seem even more distant then they really are. The trees in this park have always haunted me. Their careful pruned look and their separation from a more natural setting make them seem almost lonely. I feel sad for them.

"Dove and I both wanted to move away from the city. So we hunted for a place in the country to live. We ended up in a small town.We really needed mother nature again. To make a long story short, we went on a kind of mythical journey together."

"Like yours and my mythic journey, Judith?"

"It was different. Dove was a twin too, the first twin I ever spoke to about my experience of being a twin. Maybe it was an experience only twins can have. It was almost as if we traveled back to the womb together."

"Is that why your stomach ache so much?" Mari looks at me skeptically.

I nod. "Maybe. First,Dove and I went to South Hadley where I had gone to a women's college twenty years before. We shared one room for several weeks; I think it was about ten feet by twelve feet if you can imagine that. It was about the size of my sister's and my bedroom when I was a kid. They say we all try to recreate our early childhoods and relive them again, so we can be in control. My studio is a mansion compared to that room. It was in Jane Olive's boarding house, right across from the college, where a lot of lesbians lived.

"There was only one bed, a folding table and an overstuffe chair. When we moved in, Dove's cat, Luna, gave birth to seve kittens. Seven always brought me good luck before but nd then. One of the kittens was crushed when a heavy suitcase fell on it.

"After that, one ghastly event followed another. We had an old Chevy van, 'Eleanor,' with something always wrong. It sucked up all of our savings and I couldn't find a job. Dove and I argued constantly. And when we weren't fighting it seemed like we were reluctantly compromising. We just didn't hit it off.

"I never wanted to stay in South Hadley for one thing, especially after a disgusting incident happened at a local bar."

Mari looks gloomy. This isn't a cheery story.

"One Friday night around 8:00 I was having a drink in the college bar. I was just starting to get relaxed when these three women who were at a working-class bar, the Blue Note, telephoned the bar I was at and said they were in trouble. They sounded desperate. They said that a group of drunk, redneck guys with weapons, machetes, and axes were waiting for them across the street. Apparently, one of the three women was friends with one of the guy's wives and he was mad. I think the two women had become lovers.

"I got a group of women together—luckily it was entertainment night and the place was packed—and we took off like lightning for the Blue Note.

"When we got there we found the group of men standing across the street shouting obscenities at the bar. The three women were inside getting drunker by the second, just scared to death. It was hard to get them to talk to us coherently but finally we worked out a plan. Since the police still hadn't arrived after several calls from us, we agreed to split up into groups and head directly for our cars when the bar closed. We all decided any confrontation with the men would be deadly—no one knew martial defense and we had no weapons."

Mari's hand is on my shoulder. "I feel frightened for you," she says. "The violence is everywhere. In my country its like a permanent atmosphere in the air. Really, no place is safe now for women on the planet. Were you hurted, Judith?"

"No, but I was scared to death, believe me. At one o'clock we all left the bar. But, as soon as we got to the parking lot, Beth, the woman who had become close with one of the guy's wives, suddenly turned toward the men shouting something like, 'I'm

not afraid of you bastards. You babies need weapons because you're cowards.' Then she turned to the rest of us and said, 'I've changed my mind, Sisters, I'm going to stand up to these bastards.'

"I was blown away. How could she after we all agreed upon the safest plan? I could have killed her for endangering all of us. And to make things worse, two comrades lined up beside her and then several women formed a line, to face this really dangerous crew coming at us, flexing their muscles, and brandishing their axes.

"Dove and I raced to our van, which for once started immediately, and tore to the police station. We ordered the policeman behind the night desk to send cops to the Blue Note at once. He snorted in a sinister way and said, 'Don't worry girls, our boys are already there.'

"We didn't have time to find out why they hadn't responded to our call sooner. We raced back to the bar. We couldn't believe our eyes when we got there. Beth was being jabbed in the ribs by a mean-looking cop. That's putting it mildly. The guy looked like a werewolf. Two of his teeth stuck out like fangs. I'm not kidding.

"I jumped out of the truck, ran up to him, grabbed his stick and looked him right in the eyes. 'What do you think you're doing, young man?' I demanded. He couldn't believe that I wasn't afraid of him. He stepped back from me and snarled, 'We don't want your kind around here, lady. Do we now, boys?' Can you believe it? He was actually winking at one of the drunks, the one who had a huge knife.

"The scene was like Dryer's court scene in *Joan of Arc*. They threw around winks and grins like chips at a poker game. You wouldn't believe the jeers and smirks coming from these guys. This was enemy territory. At least I stopped the cop from jabbing Beth. But he put handcuffs on her and arrested her for causing a disturbance, while the men were released. And they were the ones with weapons.

"Meanwhile, the husband of Beth's lover had socked Beth in the jaw while we had been at the police station. And the cops

didn't arrest him either."

Mari interrupts me. "They didn't care about protecting you?"

"Oh no, any hope that the local police were interested in our safety was crushed. I wanted to leave the next day but Dove had begun to make some close friends there and didn't want to. So masochistic me agreed to stay. I tried to get into my own work but the situation with Dove and I just got worse and worse. Finally we agreed to separate."

The story has exhausted me. In fact, every time I tell someone about the Blue Note Bar incident I feel energy drain out of me. I need a kind word from Mari, but I can see she is into her own thoughts. If there is one thing I learned being with Dove, it was how much a person needs to be left alone when they are doing heavy thinking.

I take some deep breaths and wait until she looks at me again before I say, "So I packed up my belongings and was about to drive away from South Hadley for good when 'Eleanor' died completely. I had to rent a car with my last savings to get out of there the next morning. Dove hardly spoke to me. She had already begun to move into a house with eight of her friends. What a nightmare! I ended up at the Cape in a small cabin. It never felt so good to have my own space."

"After sharing a womb together, I can see that you really needed your own room." Mari laughs for the first time. I'm relieved. I was afraid my account had depressed her.

"Did you have the electrics and hot system?" she asks.

"No. I was part of a community called the *Grapevine Women;* we all lived in simple cabins with no plumbing, or electric anything. We used candles and wood stoves and raised cranberries and grapes for a living. I stayed there for a year. Then I came back to New York so I could make a record of my music. Thank the goddess I was farsighted enough to have sublet my studio here on 5th Avenue. For once, I had a place to come back to."

Mari gets up from the bench and gestures to me to join her. We walk past the elegant Gramercy Park and its sleek iron fence. I notice that no one is in the park today.

"I still don't know why you couldn't embrace her to you."

Mari eyes me sharply.

"I've been trying to tell you, sweetheart. There were some things we could share, like the fact that we were both twins and we were able to help each other in some ways. We hashed through all the taboos we had experienced—feeling as though we were untouchable freaks not to be trusted by others because we might betray a friend's secret to our twin. Dove knew what I meant when I said I had to carve out my oneness since I was born paired like she was. It's amazing how many people fantasize having a twin. They think they would always have someone complimentary who understood their every groan. But believe me, being a twin is no picnic. You're always being compared so you can't think of yourself without thinking of the other one. When a twin says 'I' it just never is the same thing as when other people say 'I'.

"Wowse! What could happens if I found my twin?" Mari delights in this thought.

"Well, it proved disastrous for me to find this twin. She knew instinctively how to hurt me. She wasn't careful of me. I realized how protective Meredith was of me when we were little. I was the baby, because I was born last and also I was smaller. Even with twins there's a hierarchy because you can't both come out at the same time, even with identical twins. I could see how Meredith acted like my older sister. She was given our grandmother's name; no one in the family was called Judith. But I took care of her too. I was always trying to get her to study more to keep up her grades. I wouldn't compete with her. I'm understanding more and more how twins should be raised like any other siblings, not be trained to be twins. They need to develop their own individuality and if possible have their own rooms. It's enough to have shared a womb for nine months. I was always anxious about Meredith and me. Dove was the older twin. Maybe that's why she felt she had the right to bully me."

"I wouldn't let my twin bully me," Mari says.

"Dove had such a hunger to be seen, such expectations that I would be the one finally to understand her. She told me her mother was sick when she and her sister were young; they were

cared for by an aunt, I think, who apparently wasn't that into them. It seemed I was always failing her; but then, I didn't feel that appreciated either."

"The movies and stories feed us so much the romantic expectations. I had that with you."

"I'm still fucked up around that with you, Mari. Of course, you know that. We're all addicts of romance. That's why you have to stay up at Josh's place. I can't accept yet that we'll never be lovers again."

"Maybe best to keep to the topic now, Judith," Mari says.

"How many times I said, or screamed at Dove, 'Don't tell me who I am and I won't tell you who you are.'"

"I don't think it matter whether you were the twin or not. You make so big deal about that. Seem like a so human need to have enough space. Maybe if you didn't live together, especially in so small room, would have been better."

"If people have learned to be careful of each other they can share very small spaces. Look at the way people have to live in China, in most of the world. Large families in two or three rooms."

"Look how poor people live in the boxes. Doesn't mean that's healthy for anyone."

"Okay, maybe it was just the fact that we were scrunched up together. But I can tell you this: I didn't know just how precious my own observations are to me before then. After Dove I felt that if anyone tried to take my feelings, my perceptions away from me, that's it. Cut. They are out of my life. I must have been as desperate to be understood as she was, otherwise why did she upset me so. I kept chanting the Yiddish word *dayenu* because I thought it meant 'enough already.' One twin is enough, two twins are too much. But it really means, 'that would be enough.' If we had stayed as friends, *dayenu*, that certainly would have been enough."

"Okay, forget it," Mari says. "I don't think the universe could bear two like me anyway. Mari, *dayenu*."

"Oh, Mari, I love you so much. But now if *you* were a twin that would be great. Then one of you could live in Argentina and

the other could always live here with me. It's so hard, isn't it? Somebody should give us a gold medal for going through what we've gone through together."

"But I'm the one who has suffered with you, Judith. I don't have a twin to know what that's been like."

"I don't talk to Meredith about you. Well, that's not all true. She came to see me this summer. I told you. Oh, forget it. Another time. Too much twin talk can get to you. We hardly know anything about each other's lives now which is so strange, considering that it was almost like we were married from inception till we separated at eighteen."

Mari grimaces at me. "It's not quite the same thing, Judith," she says.

At the corner of Twentieth Street and Third Avenue I take her elbow, steering her sharp right. I hardly notice the traffic today, or the steady flow of passersby which other times can crowd in on me in a disturbing way.

"Watch out!" Mari jerks me away from a pile of rotten fruit strewn along the sidewalk.

"Go on, Judith," she instructs after we fall into step again. "So why was it disastrous to be with Dove?" She is relentless.

"For one thing I wouldn't use the word *lesbian* as much as Dove did. She wanted everything to be lesbian. Our van was lesbian. The hats she stole from K-Mart were lesbian. Everything seemed to be lesbian to Dove, everything beautiful that is. Except me. She said that my less frequent use of the word proved that I was afraid of being one."

"Sounds like so immature. Like silly," Mari frowns.

"I know, but that's how it was. And once when I told her a dream I had where Josh appeared in a favorable light she said that meant I loved him more than I loved her. This made me a betrayer of womankind. Obviously, I just wasn't the right person for her, excuse me, the right *lesbian*. She was very intimidating, Mari. Everything became neatly classified for her as either male or female, and I mean everything. Sinister jokes were male. Sweet ones were female. Foods were either male or female. The way you cut up vegetables proved your sexual orientation. And

then when her male and female identification process got to furniture I couldn't take it. She threw our bed out and a comfortable chair, not because they were old, but because they were heavy and male-like..."

"It's the true. Some of the furniture is the more delicate."

"I know some pretty indelicate women and some pretty delicate men, Mari."

"That's the true too."

"I agreed with some of her differentiations. But I couldn't reason with her at all. I just can't live when every object around me is categorized. It was inconsequential to Dove that women give birth to both men and women and therefore have an essential role to play in bringing about equality of the sexes. That's what I think. She was more tyrannical with me than any man I've been with. But then I haven't been with that many men."

It feels good to laugh together.

"So did she have an estomache all the time too?" Mari asks.

"Mari, I'm getting sick talking about this. I think she had a head ache and a soul ache all the time."

"You did anyway," Mari comments with neither kindness or meanness in her voice. "What kinds of dreams did you have about Josh?"

"I dreamt Dove and I were walking together side by side like you and I are now, but down a steep road. It must have been a cement one because all of a sudden Josh came zooming past us on roller skates. When he reached the bottom of the hill he made a U-turn and flew right up the hill again.

"When I said to Dove, 'It was like magic the way Josh did that,' she said, 'He has a very strong power over you, Loon. You still see men as the ones who can do the special things, don't you?' She didn't think of the fact that I had dreamt the whole thing and Josh was a symbol of magical powers in me. That I was slowly reclaiming my own magic powers—and also there are a mixture of male and female energies in me anyway.

"Then she told me that she dreamt of a ritual gathering where I was taking part in the ceremony. There were two men in the group, so she left shouting at me, 'You constantly betray me, Loon!'"

"Who is this Loon you are talking about?" Mari puzzles.

"Sometimes she called me Loon," I giggle. "I know it sounds peculiar now. Then she became Crescent and I became Lute. At one point she was Peanut and I was Butter. I guess we were slightly crazy. That part was fun though."

"Judith, it's like so mysterious to me, these name changes, like disguises or something. I can't to keep up with them. To me you are Judith."

"We did it so that we kept in mind the fact that the universe, events, all living things are constantly changing. That nothing is fixed. But you see what I mean, Mari? How invasive she was?"

"Maybe she was in love with you. You are the harsh with her still."

"Probably I'm defensive because people have felt my intensity to be invasive to them. So I have to work at this too. But she really was a hungry, lonely animal who dug into my mind and then left me with her psychic fleas."

"What's that?"

"She made me uncomfortable all over like fleas do. I was too shaky with her. Maybe it can be a whole other ballgame for lesbians with an independent income. But I have to keep some positive feelings towards men, especially since I work with them. An open door generates the possibility of communication. You know, I grew up with a brother. It's natural for me to have some comraderie with a man. And I love Josh and Saul. You know that. They love me too. And sometimes I think they even understand me, believe it or not. Does that make me a lesbian with heterosexual tendencies? That doesn't mean you have to be manipulated by them."

"That is the key for our struggle in my country, Judith. Working together with some kind of true caring. Just is. We needs to have a long talk about this some other time."

"I'm almost done with this, Mari. It's still a sore spot in me. Probably my stomach ached all the time because I couldn't be myself with her; I wasn't growing. I felt judged and repressed."

"It sound like a so painful time for you." Her voice feels almost like a touch. I hadn't realized how tense I'd become.

"It's funny, Judith, because all during that time I was in a kind of similar place with my compañera Estella. She love me so much, but I couldn't to forget about you. Sometimes I felt my heart to break because she didn't want me to loves you. But I couldn't to tear out my heart for her. She is a so kind person. More kind I think than me. She take all my troubles and stupidness to her. And there are times I get so impatient with her. Times I just want to be alone. But we share a cabin by necessity. I can't afford it myself. A so poor house. By the Parana River. No electric. No plumbings. Just a leetle wood house. So sweet. And it's her money from school supplies which keep us. But I couldn't to stop her from being jealous of you."

"I remember writing to you that I wanted you to let go of me so that you could feel closer to Estella. You had to be where you were, in Argentina. In your wooden house, with your compañera."

"Yes. That was a so beautiful letter. It helped me to be okay with myself again."

"Well, I was okay with myself again, when I left Dove. But I'd forgotten how to care for myself in little ways. It felt like I had given up my body to other people. So I had to reclaim my body as well as my sense of self worth."

"It's true," Mari affirms with particular emphasis. She understands then what I feel.

"It's something like that I felt with you," she continues.

"You mean that you had to reclaim your body too?"

"No, betrayal. When I came back from Paris and you were with Leslie. Betrayal. Yes, that is what I felt. I felt like Dove felt."

"But, Mari, that isn't what I was talking about." She's pulled the rug out from under me.

Her face has changed. Old angers show. I feel stunned, as if slapped by her.

A sleepy-looking man, wearing torn trousers and stiff socks with no shoes steps directly between us. "Fifty cents, Ladies? A gentleman needs a drink," he says good-naturedly.

I reach for change but he does not stop, and I do not move towards him. I could use a drink too, now that I know what's

behind all of these questions. She has her proof, verified by my story of Dove, that I am a betrayer.

"Mari, you haven't really been listening to me have you? You've just been adding up points against me. You think it's my fault that she and I didn't get along perfectly. Is that it? What's going on here? I swear, nobody understands me." I feel so vulnerable, so disturbed. I must defend myself.

"I had many wonderful insights with Dove. So there were positive things. I dreamt about tribes of women with one big eye in their foreheads. You know how when you place your face against someone's, your eyes blend into one big eye. I guess that closeness symbolized a special way of being together for me, because in my dreams these women were always happy and vital. But even though we did have fantastic insights with each other, Dove fastened on the things about me which bothered her. Personally, I think she was punishing me for things done to her by her mother. Please don't you do that to me, Mari. I didn't betray you. I didn't say I wouldn't be with someone else. Maybe in your mind I betrayed what you had hoped would be between us, but wasn't."

My hands are clenched at my sides. We are both pulled to the Korean fruit and vegetable stand at the corner. I am drawn to the apples and pears, she to the grapes and cherries.

"Damn it, Mari. How often do we know ahead of time what we should do? I was constantly talking about you to her and she didn't appreciate that either." There. If I'm a betrayer than she's an accomplice in my crime.

"We need to eat some fruit now. That will help us," she says.

Mari has taken on a reptilian look. Cold, unbending. She blinks huge yellow and green eyes at the cherries. Betrayal, betrayer, betrayed. I already knew that Mari felt I betrayed her. How come we didn't work this out the second time she was here?

"Besides," I say putting some pears in a plastic bag, "Dove betrayed my confidence in her...."

Where is Mari? She's not beside me. There she is stalking something, like a pointer about to bee line for game. What's go-

ing on with her?

"I'm sorry, Mari," I call out. "Wait for me. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt us."

She dashes down the street. I see now. She's in pursuit of a balloon, trailing colorful strings. The balloon has a life of it's own. It skips playfully this way and that. Does it belong to that child hugging the parking meter? He gapes, wide-eyed, puckered mouth at the sight. No one else chases the object.

I pay for the fruit and run after her. "I'll help you," I cry out.

"No, I want to. She is mine!"

After awkward attempts to catch the string, the balloon decides to land. Mari quickly scoops it up. "I have her," she boasts.

A small Italian man stares at her from his pizza parlor window. He jabs at a co-worker to catch the sight: a grown woman bedazzled by a balloon.

Mari stands before me, beaming. "Oh, she is beautiful like a red sun. Judith, it remind me of my childhood when the Gypsies came to our village and had the carnival and I would wander away from the house of my mama and papa and look for them. I talk to them and they gave me little pieces of meat to nibble and soups from them kittle and tasty crackets, and balloons like she. They were always for me such the mysterious things."

She rubs the balloon against her chest, oblivious of the large ERA button pinned there.

"Mari, be careful," I gasp. "Mariposa, watch out, the balloon will—"

The space between us is ripped apart by exploding rubber. Then the woman from Argentina who has traveled across continents cries unashamedly.

* * *

I dream Mari prances up the stairs again, the eighty-eight wooden steps of my building, sounding just like a colt. As she approaches, her eyes flash and fill me as stars do. I gaze at her, almost hypnotized and she hands me flowers, all kinds of colors, but ones unfamiliar to me. I feel immensely alive.

"All. All. I want them all," she says meeting my glance.

"What have you come for this time?" I ask her.

I am not surprised when my question turns her into a small, yellow butterfly that settles on my arm.

I then feel an urgent need to look at myself in the mirror. When I do, I see an open look that denies any possibility that I was an intentional betrayer.

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679-2407. Ask for Delia.

Before going back to Argentina, Mari needs money for her airplane ticket and for presents—she wants to be home at Christmas season for the first time in five years. I need extra money to supplement my meager unemployment check. So, we jump at this ad in *Women News*.

I have some painting experience from fixing up many of my studios. But Mari has never done this kind of work before. So when Delia, the person in charge, repeats over the phone that she wants only experienced painters I decide to lie. Mari's options for jobs are limited; she doesn't have a work permit. I tell Delia that I am great on detail work and Mari is good with a roller. I think anyone who can maneuver her way around the world surely can learn how to roll on paint.

For practice, we paint a wall in the studio. I show her how to scrape, plaster, use a brush as well as a roller. She does great work but no amount of urging on my part helps increase her speed to my expectations. She knows her pace and that is that. Maybe they can give an Argentine house painter some leeway, we laughed. She can simply say that in her country she is fast.

The worst thing that can happen is that we will be fired.

The day begins well. Mari is placed on window duty, told to be accurate rather than quick and I am on woodwork. Delia and Ginny, the only others who report that day, woman the rollers.

Mari's acting is superb. Everyone assumes she has done this work before. Mainly she doesn't ask any silly questions. She is clever at adapting to new situations. I soon relax and begin to enjoy the rhythm of dipping the brush into thick paint and applying it.

Delia, the crew's leader, a striking, lanky woman with straight, black hair and piercing blue eyes, seems all arms and legs, not because of awkwardness but because her limbs are so long. She herself is a singer and tells us that the paint fumes are ruining her throat, but this is the only work she can find to do that is at all tolerable.

"Office work makes me go bananas," she says, then climbs up a well-used ladder and starts to roll paint on energetically.

Mari is framed by the window she paints. The light coming through her brown hair gives her a haloed look. I feel a quiet joy that we have been able to find work together that's almost fun. I'm curious if she feels the same thing. The atmosphere is filled with the swishes of paint brushes and clicks of roller wheels running on walls.

"Is like the breathing of Pachamma holding onto the illusion of existence."

"Come again, Mari? Pachamma?" Ginny, a quiet, small woman from Long Island is painting the wall next to the windows.

"She is the Incan Mother Earth. We have so many myths about the creation. How all existence came to be. Painting this room makes me think them."

Delia is straining from her ladder perch to get a good look at the area I'm painting, woodwork around a large archway.

"Is this okay, Delia? Am I supposed to cover the woodwork with just one coat?"

"Philip—he's the owner—said, 'Put the paint on thick because I'm only going to have one layer of paint put on the rooms.' So do the best you can. Lay it on. That looks pretty good, Judith.

Just keep the brush strokes going in the same direction though."

"Are we going to meet this Philip person?" Ginny asks. I notice that she is wearing rubber gloves.

Delia doesn't answer her.

Mari has left her windows and is dipping her brush in Ginny's tray of paint.

"Wouldn't it be easier to have your own paint can?" Ginny asks.

"No one gave me." Mari grins.

"Around here you have to fend for yourself. Delia, didn't you set up, Mari? She needs a paint can."

"It's easier for you to do it now, Ginny. I don't want to climb up and down this ladder any more than I have to. It's not the greatest. Could you get that empty coffee can by the door and give her some, please? Thanks."

"Some people aren't very organized are they, Judith?" Ginny says sardonically but does as Delia requests.

I wonder what's going on between them.

"Mari, what were you saying about the breathing? That sounded interesting." Ginny is back at her wall.

Mari is still holding up her can of paint from Ginny as if she were holding a cup of tea. I hope they don't notice.

"Don't drink the paint, Mari," Ginny smiles. "You're so adorable. Are all Latino-American dykes like you?"

"Like what am I?" Mari asks, coming out of some far-away-place. She sets the can carefully on the floor by her work station.

"I don't know. I just met you," Ginny says.

"Come on, girls, let's keep working," Delia says.

I wonder why she doesn't use the long roller and stand on the floor. The ladder doesn't look all that safe.

"So what's one of your creation myths?" Delia asks after checking to see if Mari is back working again. "I hope it's better than the one about Eve coming out of Adam's rib."

"That's a Judeo-Christian fantasy, not a creation myth," Ginny says. "Those guys tried to pull the wool over our eyes from the very beginning. I want to know where everything came from.

Animals, rocks, trees, birds, all the stuff."

"Well, I can tell you a few of them and you'll get an idea about the complexity of my people, especially the Indians people," Mari says.

"We're all ears, honey," I say.

"Hokay, my Pretty. You want one about ears? We have a so beautiful Chaco myth about how the Timbo tree came in existence."

"Timbo?" Ginny asks. "We only have timber here."

"That's corny, Ginny," I say.

"Come on, Girls," Delia interrupts. "Stop showing your ignorance. Hey, what am I supposed to do about this?"

We give her our attention. The ceiling has concave areas that the roller doesn't cover.

"Looks like you have hills and valleys in your ceiling. That looks like a brush job," I say.

"Should I do it with my leetle brush?" Mari asks, rather coyly I think.

"No. I might not seem organized but I do have proper size brushes for ceilings. I hope I can handle this problem, girls. Sorry, women. Didn't mean to interrupt you, Mari."

"Don't make no apology, Delia," Mari says. "The work come first." She settles back into her window frame. "Seems all religions have some conception of a flood and then after that the so-called civilized civilizations come. Well, they have what you call matrilinial myth to show the womens' role in the creation. The Chacos say the deluge was caused by a menstruating girl and civilization and the arts come all after that."

"That's interesting," Delia says. "Remind me, somebody, that I have to touch up these valleys with a brush later. Okay?"

"That's okay," Ginny says.

"So is some kind of reality base," Mari continues. "Not all the true Indian myths were carried down because Christian chroniclers of the ancient stories change a lot the facts. But the old myth goes that this particular girl-woman makes to come all the life forms. And she keep the peace until the invaders come."

"The Spaniards?" Delia asks.

"Probablemente, but could be older invading tribes. They say she put herself at the head of the army and repel them. Her father was so worry for her. He put his ear to the ground and wait to hear her return. But she was so busy protesting the invaders she didn't come back. And he die that way, his ear pressed to the earth. So came the Timbo tree. It's our large and so beautiful tree. The crest is like an umbrella and it fruit is black berries shaped like ears."

"Ear berries," Delia chuckles. "That's so cute."

"It's unusual to honor menstruation," I say, feeling annoyed at how Delia and Ginny see Mari as cute. "Usually in primitive societies girls are put in huts and made to keep to themselves when they begin to menstruate. Maybe that's honoring by isolation, but it would make me feel unwanted."

"They really fucked us over in every way they could," Delia says.

"We have so many myths about the origins that you would love," Mari goes on. "For example, I feel right now I'm at the royal window."

"Just holler, queen, when you need more paint and I'll serve you," Ginny says.

Better *queen* than *cute*. I feel very protective of Mari.

Mari goes on to tell us that the *royal window* in an Inca myth was the middle window, lined with jewels and gold. In the beginning, this window was the entranceway for four brothers and four sisters to make their way into the world. These brothers and sisters became the creators of civilization, the teachers of philosophy and all the arts. She tells us what solidarity there was between brothers/and sisters in many of the Inca origin stories. She also says that huacas were made to keep the worship of these creative, life forces alive. She seems proud of me when I explain to everyone that huacas are sacred objects in nature which embody spiritual forces.

Delia reminds us all of their similarity to the Hopis' kachinas. "Kachinas are spiritual guides found in masks and dolls who return to help us continue our evolutionary journey," she says dramatically, making her way down her creaking ladder to solid

ground. She rubs her neck a bit then screws the handle of her roller onto a long stick. "All right, baby, do right by me," she says, lowering the roller into a tray of paint. "Don't you dare splatter any matter." She lifts the full roller to the ceiling with such marked concentration I half expect it to leap away from her.

"Don't forget those valleys, Delia," Ginny says. "Maybe you should change professions."

"From what to what?" Delia asks.

"From painter to mythologist. Mythologists come up with the darndest interpretations of reality. They make their ideas sound like facts."

"Gee, sorry I exist, Ginny. I'll keep my mouth shut," Delia says.

Obviously there are bad vibes between Delia and Ginny. They're using Mari and me as audience to act out their shit. They act like a grumpy married couple. How can they work together under tension like this?

"What I really want to know is—what is your hometown like?" Delia gives some fast rolls and then surveys the area covered. "How does that look, team," she says as if to herself.

I stop painting a second and look. The light orchid color now covering an antique white seems darker in tone in some areas.

"Delia, are you sure the paint was mixed up well?" I ask.

"Why?"

"The ceiling looks uneven. Over there by the light fixture, it's a deeper color than where you are. See what I mean?"

"Where is *there* and where is *here?*"

"Here, I'll show you." I point out the two areas.

"I see what you mean. I don't think they are different colors. I think I put the paint on thicker here then there to cover up the indentations in the ceiling. Let me see your wall, Ginny."

"Take a look, boss." Ginny drops the roller in the pan and wipes her hands on the white cloth hanging from her pocket. She stands solid on her feet, legs spaced apart.

"A or A plus?" she quips.

"It looks pretty good," Delia says sulkily and walks back to

her ladder. "Just everybody put the paint on as thick as you can. Well, back to the grindstone. I don't know what we'd do without Mari's stories to paint by. A story please, on your home town."

Mari seems oblivious of the tension in the room. She's infinitely amenable to Delia's requests. There must be chemistry between them.

"For me it is my mama, Griselda, who gave birth to me and my fantasy under the leaves of paradise tree with all her terrible and beautiful dreams of what I would be. She has a house surrounded by climbing vines and watermelons that are like little world creations all themselves. I imagine the womens in my town came down from the sky on the vines to feed the animals and to plant the flowers and gave birth to twelve girl apostles."

"God, Mari," Delia says. "Why can't a person get a straight description from you—like some facts? Ginny likes facts. Don't you, Ginny? How many people live in your town? What do the people do for a living?"

"It's a so small town, maybe your five thousand people with as many horses and cows around the town and as many fruit trees and vegetable gardens closer to the center. Most of the houses are white and the flowers are the more beautiful flowers of the world. My mama keep the crisantema, geranio, margarita in clay pots around her house. Seem like they are the manifestaciónes of her dream images."

"Could you translate, please. I adore flowers," Ginny says.

"Those are your chrysantemums, geranmums and dailies," Mari says.

"Chrysanthemums, geraniums and daisies," I say.

"And she also grow your fuchia and begonia and other flowers so strange and delicate that you don't to see in this country."

"It's amazing. No matter what Mari tells me about her home town, I imagine the most fantastic place in the world," I say placing my brush on the top of my paint can for a moment. I run over to her and place a wet kiss on her cheek. I see she has little bubbles of paint on her lips, washes of orchid on her hands and arms. "Not to worry, Mari," I whisper. "It's washable."

"Hey, none of that on company time, you guys," Delia says.

"I'm just taking a kissing break," I say. "Do you want me to just keep doing the woodwork? Or I could take a turn on that ladder if you want."

"Why don't you just keep doing that, Jude. Maybe we'll switch jobs tomorrow."

"Okay. I'm actually getting into this woodwork. You get such a sense of accomplishment with painting; it's all very clear what you've done and what you haven't done. The only problem I have with this work is the paint smell. It reminds me of my home town. Mari's sounds so gorgeous, all flowers and picket fences. I got an industrial town when they were dishing out home towns, an endless landscape of rectangle buildings, pipe lines, towers, and the most foul odor of chemicals. If you get past that you see the homes of the millionaires. The alchemists who have turned chemicals into mansions."

"Where do you come from, Judith?" Ginny asks.

"Centerville, Ohio."

"Oh, the Midwest. Tornado land."

"The land Dorothy and Toto had to get away from to find Oz. I had to get away from it too, to find myself."

"Hey, Jude, you're pretty poetic yourself." Delia says.

"I wish I'd felt like a poet when I was growing up there. But I felt like a misfit. Ms. Unfit. The arts were the playthings of the wealthy executives of the Burrough Plastic Company, not something you did for real. It was something you might do after a nine-to-five day or after making supper for your family. The idea of focusing on your imagination, on your intuition and feelings was seen as a luxury. No one talked about intelligence of the senses. About sensuality. That's what Mari shows me. Someone who's really magnified and developed the world of her own impressions."

"I see what you mean," Delia says. "She does have a gift. Hey, Argentinian, you're a whole Walt Disney movie, or better, a Fellini film."

"There you go being glib again, Delia," Ginny says. "I think everybody should stop talking so we can get some work done here."

"Well, maybe I don't have the gift of gab, Mari," Delia says, "but you do seem fantastic to me. Is that okay to say, Ginny?"

What's with Ginny. It's a bore to hear them go at each other. Delia definitely is struck by Mari. And Mari's in great form today. I've never heard her wax so poetic without interjecting some diatribe about the poverty of South America and the nastiness of my country.

"But, Mari, if you're all that attached to your hometown," Delia holds her roller suddenly mid-air and looks straight at Mari in a challenging way, "then how come you left it so long? Five years is no sabbatical. It's more like retirement." Her voice changes. "Gee, I don't know why I said that. It's just that whenever I go home I feel like E.T. Actually, I don't go home any more. I've been disowned." She seems not to notice the paint running down the roller handle onto her arm.

"Just become famous and they'll all come crawling to your door," I call up from a hands and knees position on the floor. Seeing the amount of paint rolling down the boss' arm has inspired me to put tape between the molding and the slick parquet floor. Why didn't she have us do that before we began to paint?

"I love your descriptions, Mari," Delia says. "It's hard to feel anything when you're surrounded by cement. God, but it's hard to paint ceilings." She twists about nervously. "Actually, talking about loving one's land seems as abstract to me as talking about life insurance policies." She stops moving a second to wipe sweat from her forehead, smearing paint on her skin. "Jesus!" she bursts out. "I've got more paint on me than Tom Sawyer had on his fence. Everybody better be careful. I forgot to have us tape the drop sheet flush to the floor molding. I must be losing it. Oh, Judith, so that's what you're doing? Good girl. Would you mind going all around the room and doing that?"

"Not at all," I say.

"I know what Mari feels and it's not romanticism," Ginny says.

Ginny impresses me. She has already taped up her area. I don't see one spot of stray paint near her. Everything about her says 'neatness.' Her short black hair looks like a skull cap. "It's

dedication," she adds. "I've never left my country. If I ran away from all that bothered me in America, I'd always be running." She punctuates her comment with an exuberant swoop of the roller, finishing up a large portion of the end wall.

"Ginny, you sound a little like me," I say. "I haven't even traveled to Europe. It's like I have to stay here and keep making America beautiful. Ever since I worked with SDS in the mid 60s I've felt that. But I admire so much what Mari has done. She has gone on an essential journey."

I catch Delia giving me an approving look. "You sound as romantic as Mari," she says, "or at least as dedicated. We need you." She swings her roller into the pan, then wipes a white shape away with the fresh, orchid color.

We work in silence for a while, but I feel uneasy. There's a small black cloud swirling around Mari. Momentarily she whips away from the window towards us, paintbrush held tightly to her chest. "You women don't really understand what I mean when I speak about my love for Argentina. I left her to know her. My connection to the land is the same as the Indian peoples have here. I am made of the rivers, mountains. She is always visible under my finger nails." Her voice breaks. "Oh, why I can't to give the details. It's so frustration for me sometimes—the English."

The sudden change in Mari's mood affects the room like a strange, new odor. Only the sounds we make working can be heard. I know when she's upset she needs space. It is some moments before I realize Delia has approached her. She grabs her arm awkwardly. "It's okay, Mari," she says sweetly. "I think I do know what you're talking about. Look, why don't we have some lunch now. We should get away from the paint smell. Right, Ginny?

* * *

I remember what a welcome relief lunch-break was for all of us that day. We sat down with sliced turkey sandwiches, cold fruit drinks and fresh vegetable sticks which Delia had brought. The tension was as thick as the mayonaise on Delia's sandwich as I got a chance to look more closely at our new acquaintances.

Both Delia and Ginny looked very tired. Had their work done it to them or something else?

Delia initiated the talk. "I come from a family of farmers on my mom's side. There's Arapaho blood there. My father is a blue-blood. That's funny! Blue bloods and red skins. We're all color coded. I wonder does that make me purple-nerved?"

"Well, you're at least purple skin now," I said stroking her spotted arm.

"I don't knows what is blue bloods. What is?" Mari's moodiness had vanished.

"Blue bloods are the families of the English aristocracy who came over on the Mayflower and settled in North America. They are portrayed as the ones who started civilization here—as if this land hadn't been inhabited for centuries before by Native American Indians. So, my great-great-grandfather came over on the big ship. Is that right? I may have added an extra father or eliminated one, but you get the point."

"Yes, I got it. You were a blue baby because you were suffocated by all those fathers on top of you," I quipped.

"Very clever, Judith," Delia said.

Ginny spoke louder than usual. "Now I know why you want to be our boss, but at the same time you feel guilty about it, Delia."

"Why?" Delia scowled.

Ginny was angry. "Because just like oil and vinegar, sweetie, Arapahos and Puritans don't mix. The Puritan in you feels it's your right and duty to lord it over other people and the Indian in you rebels against the boss mentality and wants us all to work side by side as equals. One of you smokes a peace pipe and the other puffs on a briar. Your ambivalence makes you fuck up sometimes."

"Since when did I boss you, Ginny? That's not fair!"

"You keep a lot of the information to yourself!" Ginny's voice tightened. "Like what estimate you gave the guys whose house this is, Delia, and when are we supposed to have all the rooms painted."

I watched them in slight shock. They aren't even trying to be cool in front of us. Now I understood the tension between them

all morning.

"I'm supposed to call you up everyday," Ginny fumed, "to see if there's work? No way, Jose. I need to plan my schedule. I've got a kid to support. My life can't depend upon whether you feel like working or not. I think you should explain each job situation to us and let us make a schedule together. Even if you don't want to work more, others of us do." She wriggled back to an unpainted part of a wall and slumped against it.

"I had no idea you were that angry at me. Am I supposed to read your mind? Why didn't you say something before?" Delia's voice shook.

"It's not a case of mind-reading, Delia. It's a case of consideration for your sisters."

Delia's face burned. "Fuck consideration of my sisters. I've been considering my sisters for years and what have they done for me? How have they treated me? Like shit. Who do you think put up the money to start the Tea House? And I told the collective it was only a short loan. Do you know Irene Kranitz? She was in charge of finances and she promised to get the money back to me."

"Oh, I know Irene," I said. "She's friends with Grace Cooper and Val Cranston. I know them all well from the...."

"Well, if you see Irene, Judith, remind her that I'm still here waiting for my money! I told the collective I could loan them money for only a year, the money I had saved up so that I could travel to Greece. They promised they would pay me back within six months. It's been three years and I haven't seen a bloody cent."

"That's terrible, Delia," Mari said. "The womins need so much to keep the trust between them."

"Between us," Ginny said.

"If it's being a Puritan to want what belongs to me, great, then I'm a fucking Puritan. And as for the running of this crew, who gets our gigs? Who runs all over the five boroughs finding work for us? I do. And I'm not taking any extra pay for the extra work I do. If you want to get down to the nitty-gritty, sweetie, I'm being taken!"

"Okay, Delia." Ginny said cautiously. "This just proves my point. We need to talk business. I'm dissatisfied with certain things and you are too. Let's get it out in the open. Maybe Judith and Mari have some ideas. I agree with you. I think you should get paid for the extra work you do. Write it into the expenses. But I need to know more about the specifics of each job and be able to expect a certain number of hours of work each week. Otherwise, it feels real flakey. I need some security in my life."

"Just a minute. I'll get out my peace pipe so I can talk to you." Delia still looked ready to throw a punch.

"Could you two pull in your horns for a second?" I stretched my shoulders in a circling motion, trying to get rid of the tension in them. "If you don't, I'm going to start throwing paint on the wall. Look, Mari and I are new with this. You shouldn't show us all your dirty laundry right away. "

Ginny threw me a sour look." You're pretty outspoken for a new worker. We don't need mediators."

"What's wrong with everybody? What happened?" Delia looked suddenly like a traffic cop. Her arms flailed in all directions. "One minute we're getting along fine, and then the next some bad energy came into the house. Mari will think we're bitches. Don't throw your frustration at me, Ginny. You can call me up any time and talk to me privately. Did you get up on the wrong side of the bed this morning?"

"I fell out of bed and cracked my funnybone so I can't see the humor in anything," Ginny mocked. She fell silent.

Mari crunched noisily on a carrot. Then Ginny tried to make a joke about 'how many women libbers did it take to do spring house cleaning? Not waiting for a response she gave one; 'None. By the time they decide how it should be done it's already summer.'

"That puts down women, Ginny," I said. "I thought you were going to say, 'None, because women libbers always keep their houses clean.'"

"I thought you were going to say, 'None, because women libbers are too poor to have houses,'" Delia said.

"I hope that's not all the women libbers here think about in

the spring is to clean houses. They should be out with the bees and the flowers making love together," Mari said breaking the heaviness. "Delia, tell to me about your red, white and blue fathers."

"My white father started his own company—the one that takes baby pictures in hospitals. Everyone wants a picture of their newborn child. He was able to get sole rights to do this in hospitals all over the country. So to make a long story short, he is a millionaire."

I whistled in disbelief. "And you're painting houses, Delia, when you could be living in the lap of luxury?"

She looked at me pointedly. "That's a naive remark. I'm not a child. I have to make my own way, you know."

"What I mean is they probably send you money whenever you need it, right?" I asked sheepishly.

"No, they don't, dear," she answered reproachfully. "I've been disinherited by my father because I'm not going to give him a grandson to take on his great name, his business."

"He sounds like a pig," Ginny said.

"Pigs I can take. My father is cruel," Delia said. After a heavy moment she continued. "My mother's mother's name was Swift Hawk."

"Really, Delia," I cut in excitedly. "I've been having strange dreams lately where I'm taking part in a ritual. A psychic healer told me last year that she saw Mohawk blood in my past. She said it came through my father's side. His mother was born near Montreal in an area settled by the Mohawk Nation. I haven't talked about it with my father yet. Somehow I already know he'll deny the possibility. All they want to claim is their European roots. We have no official family tree written up to prove it. But I know it's true. Sorry for interrupting, Deal."

"More of us have Native American blood in us than we're told," Delia said. "Anyway, Swift Hawk died an alcoholic on the reservation in Colorado when my mother was three. And some Mormons in Salt Lake City adopted her."

"That's a sad story," I said. "It reminds me of something—Oh, I remember now. Did anyone read the article in the *New*

York Times about the Hopis stopping their rituals?" Nobody responded. "The article said that the Hopis announced they weren't going to do their rituals to keep the earth in rotation any more as a direct rebellion against the government for interfering with their land rights."

"My God, it's come to that," Ginny muttered.

"Ever since I read that, I've been haunted by another image that comes when I'm about to fall asleep. I see a young Indian woman plunge into a deep hole. She falls very slowly and begins to moan. Suddenly, she stops herself. I don't know how, but she perches herself against the earth wall. What do you think that means?"

"I think," Delia said, "it means that the Mohawk in you is also rebelling against the destructive forces at work in the universe. This Mohawk is not going to continue her ancient ritual of falling to the center of the earth. You could call it active resistance." She winked at me then added, "Look, maybe it means you should see a therapist. I don't know what it means. Just let me finish my story, will you? Where was I? Oh, yes, I remember. Mother was educated to be a teacher. After a year of teaching she met and married my dad. He wouldn't let her work after that, assuming she was going to have bushels of kids. But when she gave birth to me," her voice caught a second, "her uterus erupted. It just split apart for some reason; they gave her a complete hysterectomy without asking for her permission."

"Butchers," I said.

"My father makes fun of her all the time, calls her a peasant. He wants a socialite, a showpiece now. She has dark hair so he tells his business associates she's Spanish. At parties she sits quiet, passive, while he tells stories. It all makes me sick. So that's why I stay away."

"That's tough stuff, Delia," Ginny said almost tenderly. "Mari, I still don't get why you left Argentina. Isn't that something only rich people and the intelligensia can do?"

Mari's eyes lit up. "I *am* part of the intelligensia of my country. I left because I need to know who I am so that I can speak real in my land. I'm Italian, Jewish and Indian. You don't speak

clearly if you don't to know all your roots. When I go back I want to recreate the myths to inspire us again to new creative hope. It's a so dark reality in my country now with the military regime."

"What is happening there, Mari?" Delia asked.

"I'll know better when I get back. The papers are covering up the true facts. I am afraid for all my friends there."

"You just came back from Europe, right?" Ginny's voice softened.

"Yes, I was there for four months. Many writer friends from Argentina are in exile in France and Spain. I can't to see how they could stay so long time away from her, her struggle. It seem like some kind of terrible betrayal to me of our land. And I wanted to make touch with the Spanish journals I am familiar. If my works can't to be publish in Argentina then maybe here or maybe in the Spanish presses."

Here was my opportunity to get some support from the others to encourage Mari to stay. Reports had been appearing in the newspaper everyday about leftists, like herself, missing suddenly.

Maybe Mari would talk more about her situation with Delia and Ginny, after she got to know them better—tell others how afraid she is about what could happen to her when she does go back.

* * *

I feel worn out from worrying about her.

"What's the matter, Jude," Delia says. "The work getting to you—or maybe the paint fumes? You look really tired out. Maybe we should get back to work before we get too relaxed."

We gather up our lunch papers and stretch ourselves. I am just about to head for the bathroom in the hall when a tall man in a light tan suit enters the room.

"Taking a break, girls?" His tone is sarcastic and wooden. Both hands remain hidden in pants pockets. He tenses his lips stiffly, moving them together and apart nervously. His eyes, large and hurt looking, draw me.

All of us, like one body with multi-heads, come to attention.

"As a matter of fact we're just finishing lunch, Phil." Delia responds with some kind of aggression in her voice.

"Well, that's good because I'm paying you each five bucks an hour to do this work?" He shoots over to Mari's window and eyes it disapprovingly. "You're putting the paint on too thin. You've got to cover the white in one coat. Have you been checking the work, Delia?" Then he swings back to Delia. "I told you that, when I hired you. The whole house has to be painted in the three week period. This is only the first floor. I'm not paying over the estimate!"

"But it doesn't to want to cover completely," Mari says.

"Shh! Let Delia handle it, Mari," I mutter.

"It's not good enough, girls," the man states flatly, after a close scrutiny of Ginny's wall as well. He struts to the doorway and swirls around. "This floor should be done by tomorrow morning if you're going to be on schedule. You've got to do better. I'll be back tomorrow to check again." Then he charges out before any one of us can speak. Ginny gives him the finger.

"What a creep," she whispers. "I don't need this job badly enough to be insulted like that."

"Shh, Ginny, he can still to hear you." Mari grimaces. "I can't afford to not do this work. You can get other work. I'm illegal. They will put me in jail if they find out my visa is due over. I can't to repair the situation if they discover me."

"Don't worry, Mari," Delia says. "Unfortunately, he didn't hear Ginny. I wouldn't jeopardize your job." A tender look passes between them.

"Who was that rude person?" I ask.

A loud bang downstairs informs us he had left. We relax.

"Only the owner." Delia groans and moves her ladder to an unpainted corner of the room. "His name is Philip Owens. He and his boyfriend own this house. They make a business out of buying old houses, like this one. Then they fix them up—I mean then they pay other people minimally to fix them up—so they can sell them for twice what they paid. Your average clever businessmen."

"You mean he's gay? And he treats *us* like that! And he's not

even going to live here?" I say.

"There you go being naive again, Judith." Delia snorts outright. "They are in this purely for money. Gay people can be enterprising too, you know."

"And jerks," I say. "I hope you aren't defending the guy. That was arrogant behaviour. Oppressed people ought to be supportive of one another. I don't think that's naive. I think that's political. It's true, I can't get rid of an ideal image I have about gays and lesbians being different from other people in a special way. I guess because we've had to deny our reality so often and survive anyway."

"Maybe he doesn't consider himelf oppressed, sweetie. After all he is rich," Ginny says, stretching her arms up palms flat, as if to push away the unpleasant incident. "Here we are, poor church mice helping that mother fucker get richer, besides getting sick from paint fumes."

Delia nods. "You're right. Jesus, what am I doing to my poor throat, my operatic voice?" She warbles up and down a scale and ends with a terrible hacking cough. "But don't use that expression, Ginny," she croaks. "It really denigrates mothers."

"He's fucking me over and I'm a mother," Ginny growls. "What should I call him?"

"A prick. A capitalist banana." Delia responds.

"Hey," I break in, "don't put down bananas. Let's just ignore him. We'll do the best we can. What else can we do. Just don't take anymore work from him and tell all the other painters you know that this guy is a cheapskate. Be political about it. He knows we're doing a good job. He's got to find fault with us to justify the fact, or to hide the fact that we're only being paid five dollars an hour. Union painters get at least fifteen bucks. Just be thankful we don't have to do this all of our lives. I think I would kill myself if I had to do this all my life even for twelve dollars an hour."

"Thank God I have some nice gay friends," Ginny says. "Otherwise I'd really believe all men are pricks."

"Well, obviously there are women pricks too," I say.

"Yah, like Irene Kranitz," Delia says.

"It isn't Irene's fault that you haven't gotten your money back. It's the whole collective's," I say.

"Well, five dollar all hour seem like so good a deal for me," Mari says. "I want to keep this job. I'll put more of the paints on for five dollar all hour. Compare to what my people have to do to survival that's noting. They bend down and shine capitalists' boots clean just to git a little bread. Not the top of boot, but bottoms. We eat the scraps the Norte Americanos businessmans feed to their little poodles, the ones the poodles snub their noses at. The childrens in my country eat the sugar the imperialists don't put in their coffee. They go into the restaurants to steal the sugar cakes. They live on the sugar and use the papers for toilet wipes. That's how my people have to do to survive. I'll put more paints on him window if that's what he wants. In fact, I'll paint him window glass and I'll paint him little prick bright red for five dollars an hour and I'll fill his little asshole full of paint."

We all burst out laughing with Mari. Her message gets through: we still have the luxury of choice which she doesn't have.

We don't talk as much the rest of the afternoon, feeling pressured to get as much of the room painted as possible. Mari finishes six windows which pleases Delia. Mari points out to us that the games we played when we were growing up were deeply rooted in the class values we had come from. Delia and I had played bridge, Ginny bingo. One game honors intelligence, the other luck.

When we say goodbye at the end of the day after cleaning up the brushes and rollers, Mari tells Ginny and Delia, "I kiss you," with the kind of gentleness ordinarily shown to old friends. In Mari's mind they are old friends. She has just shared eight hours with them. She says she will never forget their faces.

Ginny and Delia even give one another a hug with a promise to call each other that night. They will iron things out between them so we won't have to hear their problems during the rest of the time we will all be working together to finish the job.

* * *

Just before Mari leaves for Argentina in December, we become lovers again. Our bodies need a great deal of comforting. Mari shows me how to release tension from her neck and shoulders. Our previous intense passion takes on a kinder aspect. We cannot talk about the future; it is too painful to confront. I write a song to her then. Even now when I sing the words I cry. I want to rock Mari with this song:

Footsteps sounding in my brain,
Footsteps, I hear them again and again,
When I go to sleep at night
And I'm resting from the day,
Footsteps take me away,
Take me away.

I see a wall of falling water,
A sky so blue
And there's a river flowing through me;
Take me to the one who is leaving.

Take me where her chariot goes riding.
The horse, the cloud, the serpent wave goodbye.
I can hear the sounds of her body.
You can too, for
It's real to love a woman,
Yes, it's real.

Take me where her doe waits kneeling in the meadow.
The stars are falling in her eyes.
I can see her walking in the forest,
Oh, it's real to love a woman,
Yes, it's real.

Take me to the crossing bridge
And join me with another.
It's real to love a woman.
Yes, it's real to love a woman.
I have dared to love a woman
And it's real.

I go alone with Mari to the airport. I want to feel the full impact of her departure without the comfort or distraction of another person. However, there are too many errands to complete to have time to acknowledge the gravity of the event as it is happening.

Later, when I remember us in the airport together, when I can see how the seconds ticked by like a time bomb as I hung odd parcels of books, clothes, tiny objects she'd collected in her years of travel under her cloak so she could pass through customs without having to pay a considerable sum of money, then I remember the look she gave me. It was similar to the look my mother had once hurled at me when she was being wheeled away to face a serious operation—a frightened, imploring look which asked me to save her from what lay ahead. She looked at me as if I were life and she were going towards death.

In only a matter of hours Mari would be entering a country tortured by the Junta. Violent, unaccountable deaths of creative, political young people like herself have become an everyday occurence. But we both do what we have to do and she is gone.

I believe now it was that look imploring me for help, for an answer, for a connection that ignited the nature of my connection to her—some people might call it an obsession—in the next three years when I do not see her and only sporadically hear from her.

* * *

Buenos Aires, Domingo 10 de mayo

Querida Judith,

I'm working like a free-lancer, writing notes and doing translations, but I make almost nothing of money. I'm living at a poor hotel and this became so dangerous each day. So this week I and a friend found a very small house two hours from the downtown and we took it by a very cheap rent, eight dollars by month. The house have not electricity neither running water.

It is impossible for people like me to rent a house or apartment in Buenos Aires today. Thousands of people without a place where to live. Also thousand of people are going outside of my country these year, Argentinian and also Uruguayan and Chi-

leans people that came in the past looking for work are refused here. Specialists calcule that most of three millions of Argentinians will be outside by the end of the year. My country have only 25 millions of persons. People are going to Venezuela, Mexico and Spain especially, looking for job and liberal democracy because are the only countrys (also Costa Rica) with Spanish language and similar cultural traditions where you can still find it. But Venezuela close now the frontiers. Mexico is at the door of a coup the state, and, with the international economic crisis, there is not a place where really to go. So people are going to Canada and Australia if they can. Here, in many aspects we seem to come back to the politics of the conservative and reactionary of 1930.

This administration respond to the interest of the big landlords, some multinational corporations and, of course the directives from Washington. The worker people are without any kind of protection now. Unemployment is growing and the salarys became so low. Into the free trade politics, the government liberate the price and, only in two weeks there was a 47% of increase of cost of living. This happened in April and just in June the salary will increase a 15%. Inflation will not stop yet, and much people will be starving next spring. The guerrila is being erased. We heard police sirens and we see tanks and trucks full of soldiers all the day in the streets of the city. And still people talk about the possibility of a new military coup more fascist. Anyway, the fascist regime, with other characteristics began during the Peronist government. This will take long. The imperialist capitalism is losing Africa, and they are pressing into Latin America. Our life are going in this process and there is too much death in my generation. I grew through dictatorships and military coups. I have nothing to feel nostalgia from the liberal democracy, I really dont know it.

But from here will begin the real class struggle. Peronist populism is death. This dark time inaugurate a new era. And I will be here.

My friend, I cannot say nothing about social reality in my regular letters, for that I'm talking about all this in this letter. Garcia

will bring this letter to you in New York. He is a so good person traveling now to your country.

About my work. I can say I'm trying to remember. The present and the past. I talk about the collective memory. Some time I can't understand we are not together, drinking coffee and talking.

Tell me about your personal life, about the little things of life.

Mari

DREAMS, STRUGGLES, AND GIFTS

I wonder how I can endure the terribleness of living day to day without knowing how she is. There are times I become afraid that if I lose my memory, I will lose her forever.

I picture two points resting on the horizon. I am one of the points. The other point becomes shape, organic. Several projections, extending from a larger mass, slowly take human form. This human shape moves towards me. One moment she is as tall as this capital letter I; the next, she is larger than my eye. I wonder, will she do me injury?

She comes towards me. She is smiling. As she walks past me, she says, "Goodbye." I wave and say goodbye too, then take the path she has left behind. I wonder at what point the woman who is becoming smaller and smaller behind me, will disappear altogether? Will it be when I can no longer remember what she looks like or the way she speaks?

Perhaps we are fortunate to have had other leave-takings, I tell myself. Perhaps our goodbyes, along with all the other goodbyes I have suffered, can teach me how to embrace myself more fully, especially the parts that can make me feel strong. Then I will find a way to cope with this situation.

* * *

I leave New York City, and for the next two and a half years I travel and live in New England. For a short time I live with Dove and then alone. I work very hard to find my own center again or more accurately a new center. Sometimes I am connected to womens' collectives and other times I live alone. My visions and dreams become my teachers.

I see a fierce Mohawk woman sitting cross-legged on the ground. She plays a drum and makes sounds. She sings of wanting to be a bird flying, a tree holding earth and sky together. In the midst of a small town in the midst of congregations of WASPs in the midst of Ohio in the midst of America she sings herself into a solid shape. Her ancestors from Pennsylvania, Canada, England, France, Germany, make a circle about her. Some of them are disturbed by her singing.

I draw on this Indian blood from my father's mother. She died when he was seven. Why did they not give me her name, Maria, as they gave my sister our mother's mother's name? The name Judith is used by both Christians and Jews. In Hebrew it means Jew. By giving me this name, my parents unwittingly expanded their tribal boundaries. They have not wanted me to go where this name has taken me.

Mari used to tell me that sometimes when she'd call out my name it would stick in her throat like a tickle she couldn't get rid of. But when I close my eyes and say her name—Mari, Mariposa, Mari Mother, she comes to me.

She circles above me. Sky Goddess, dragon, horse, chariot, bird are one. They are Mari.

She sails towards me as I stand alone in the center of a meadow. I have been waiting for her. Her look is angry so I ask her what has upset her so.

Without a word she takes up her reins and moves on and up, becoming clouds again. I pick up a butterfly net and try to catch the clouds, but they slip easily through the netting and their shapes escape me. I will wonder and wait for her to come again to me in a vision.

* * *

Dream—South Hadley, Massachusetts.

It is very hot and I can't open the windows in the front of the apartment where I am staying because the exhaust from a steady stream of passing cars would enter the room.

I rest in the kitchen where a small window is open.

The bed is here for it is the quietest and coolest room in the house. I'm having trouble concentrating.

Cries of children hit the window like pebbles. I want to relax by playing on the marimba. But I can't get off the bed.

The door bell rings. I manage to drag myself out of the apartment and into the hallway. I notice that the hall and steps are a bright red color. Then I remember I had painted them to cheer myself up the week before.

I try to open the front door but it's locked or stuck.

I rise up on tiptoes to look through a small, dirty window, but no one is there.

Then I notice the corner of a letter jutting through the mail slot of the door. I pull at it without being able to move it. I can barely grasp it with my fingers.

I shout to whomever might be holding the letter on the other side of the door to let it go. But there is no response. So I kick at the door, trying to open it.

When the frustration becomes unbearable, I break out sobbing.

As tears flow down my cheeks, the letter slips easily by itself through the slot and falls to the floor.

I pick it up and see it is from Mari.

When Mari does come to me again in a vision I see her in profile. She has on her Guatemalan blouse embroidered with many colors. Her huipil. As I look, her chin begins to recede and disappear. Her two eyes, two moons, become two creatures. They approach me. I do not know them. Their appearance astonishes me. Rare, ancient, mysterious objects, tremendous energy and light emanting from their centers. Quazars.

When the two creatures smile at me, I feel my whole body smile with them. They wear colorful gowns and silver wheels beneath their feet. They beckon me to join them. I want to, but I am afraid. I know without seeing them naked that they are hermaphrodites. Yet I know their essential selves to be female. By that I mean their intelligence, their sensibility and their language is one I can perceive as being close to mine. The experiences molded in our bodies are familiar. Of course, I have invented them.

They aren't articulate with words. They don't need to explain themselves. I don't ask them to. Their presences speak clearly, openly. Words will only prevent our connection. Since nothing is hidden, I do not have to ask them questions.

They are a hermaphrodite duo, a twin amalgamation of both sexes, beckoning me to go with them, and I am afraid. They still seem to be rolling on their liquid rolling wheels, trembling for a moment near me. They know exactly who I am. I will not go with them and leave myself. I cannot. Yet their invitation will lead me through the journey of transfiguring essential parts of myself. I will find them in me.

I will be them. Both of them. I will be mother and father, Constance and Matthew, Meredith and Judith, Josh and Judith. I will be Mari and Judith. I will be the twins, two, two I's, two eyes. I will be two in one, two eyes in one face.

I dream of her eyes again, seeking assurance from them, but they are transfixed by their own need. I understand that it is the need not to be distinguished from star, from plant, from animal. When I catch a glimpse of her again, appearing to stand human on the grass at the corner of La Rue de la Rosa and La Rue de la Orchidea, waiting for her picture to be taken, she can't hold the pose long. Thought moves her on to discover what is at the following street corner. She crawls away from me, a chameleon, and begins circling me with her changing colors.

The Sky Goddess circles once more and comes down to me. This time language accompanies her mask of anger.

"I am angry with you because you do not play with the sky animals," she says.

"What do you mean?" I ask her, perplexed and then amused. "Everyone knows there are no sky animals. There are only the animals that live here with me on the ground, like the lions and the birds." I disappear into my laughter, my skepticism and when I look up again she is gone.

* * *

Dream—Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Two women from Argentina are sitting at a rusty kitchen table with me. They seem to be withholding information. They

are dressed like myself in blue jeans and cotton shirts.

I ask them many questions about the area where Mari lives near Buenos Aires. They look at each other often and raise their eyebrows suspiciously. I ask, "What is it like there? Is it safe? Can you get to the city easily?"

The stouter woman with a butch hair cut nods abruptly, "yes." Then her companion echoes the nod. They don't smile.

"Is it a place where other lesbians live too? And artist-type people?"

Again the first nods and the second follows.

"She can't write to me anything too specific about what she is doing. So her letters all sound like poems to me. I'm getting very frustrated. I thought you could tell me what it's like there by the river where she lives."

I didn't want to tell them too much either. What if they were agents for the military? What if in fact they were seeking information about her activities in this country? From me?

The two women soften towards me. They relax and smile. The one with curly black hair and white, bone-like skin talks brokenly. "Everyone lives there hidden, in run-down little cottages. It's a ghetto for homosexuals, like us. And they have to be very quiet and keep to themselves."

"What is your friend's name," the androgynous woman asks.

"Mari," I reply. "Do you know her?"

They both shake their heads, no. "We don't know her,"

I cannot forget that Mari has told me she is angry that I do not play with the sky animals. For weeks I try to understand the message in this vision as I go about my daily tasks. Then one day as I am gazing into the vast roof of blue sky, I have an insight: My sky animals are the clouds always in transformation. Like chameleons, they change with their shapes and feed the imagination.

In my vision, Mari became Sky Goddess and told me that I did not play enough with the sky animals, the cloud forms of my own imagination. She seemed to say that if I played more with my fancy, I could find her in myself and ease the loneliness of

our separation. My dream told me that what I thought was loneliness for Mari was also a loneliness for a far away part of myself, that I had projected upon her, a part that I must now reclaim. How long will it take me to understand my own insight, I wonder

* * *

Dream—New York City.

Where do I come from? As I think the question, I become aware of my surroundings. It is a very bright moonlit night, brighter than I have ever experienced night to be.

There are a few stark fir trees about me. I look down at the ground and see that it's porous, but hard like lava.

Energy seems to be emanating from the surface. I find I can jump very high into the air and float back to the ground.

As I think again to myself—Where do I come from?—my attention is pulled to the sky. Through the black branches of a tree, I see a bright, full moon. I think, How perfect it is. Then my glance moves on to the right where I see a second, equally bright, but slightly smaller moon.

"I am from the land of the two moons," I say.

Then a face glows out of the first moon. The face is that of a woman. It looks like Mari's face to me.

I hear a voice say, "It is Mari's face; but also the face of Diana."

In my dreams I try to go to Mari in Argentina. Sometimes Argentina is just beyond Paris and the plane officials refuse to fly me there. Sometimes Argentina is in hidden areas of this country that I am somewhat familiar with. In one dream it is on an island south of the Carolinas. But when I look for her there after days of walking on long roads in the hot sun, neighbors tell me she has left. 'She is traveling,' they say, 'around the world.'

Once I dream I find her in an old Spanish church. I still remember the spectacular stained glass windows. I think—This is where I ought to find Mari, surrounded by rich colors and light. When I approach the woman kneeling and praying in the church, who I think is Mari, a face of a stranger turns towards me. She gives me the same imploring, frightened look that Mari gave me

in the airport. There is no joy in her eyes.

Other dreams I have are infiltrated by falling orange leaves. Orange leaves fascinated Mari. In one dream they make a path to a small house. I count the leaves, as one counts the days before expecting the arrival of a loved one, while walking towards this house. I believe Mari is there.

When I near the small wooden cabin it changes into a simple pine box. Inside the box is snow and decayed brown leaves.

I awake from the dream with a strange taste in my mouth. Is the taste of her on my tongue? Or is it the taste of those persistent orange leaves now rotten from cold and the absence of a life source?

I cling to the few letters I do receive from her and the odd mementos she has left behind. A satin-covered music box that pictures a young girl sitting at the feet of an older woman who is playing the guitar becomes an icon as valuable to me as the cross is to others. Mari had given it to me, then asked me to teach her some of my songs.

Other odd objects that had attracted her but could not be taken back with her remain on my shelves: a carved perfume bottle from China, sandals she'd worn through Central America with soles made from rubber tires, letters from many acquaintances she'd made in her travels and a worn-out doll, half animal and half child, from her childhood. This doll, whom I would call Zorra after one of the characters in her writing, had protected her during her journeys and now the doll would serve as the spirit of Mari for me. Mari whom I adored. Mari who adored me. Mari who always appeared when I needed her. Mari with small, finely modeled feet had now become wedded to my dreams.

* * *

Dream—New York City.

I have been flying all night. At times I soar above the trees in a relaxed, exhilarating manner. At other times I struggle to lift myself above the tree tops. When dawn comes I land in a small village. I walk through the village of small, wooden shops into thick, lush woods. Within the woods I find a clearing where a

small group of women are busy building simple wooden huts. I almost feel that they are expecting me. They are naked and I am aware of the fact that I can't see their vaginas because they are folded within their bodies.

One woman carves out the inside of a huge wooden log. Her movements are energetic and graceful. As I watch her, she places bones and shells in the large hollow place in the log. She turns to me then and tells me in a mellow voice that she is calling for the tree spirit. As I watch her open her mouth and sing I see for the first time that she is Mari. But she is some aspect of Mari that I have never seen before—the Mari that is completely her own person and thus out of my reach.

As I continue on my walk, past her, I place an apple I retrieve from my pocket in the hollow of her log. Her face is senuous and open. I imagine her tongue entering me and giving me pleasure. As if she has guessed my thoughts she touches my arm lightly and asks if I would like to join her and the other women in a ritual. I nod enthusiastically. We gather in a grove of pine trees emitting the heavy, pungent smell of resin. The carver motions for us to gather in a circle and she begins to talk to us. She informs us that we will do a ritual of tongues, which will aid us in our process of learning to speak a common language.

A sleek doe races by us, adding a rhythm of crackling, branch sounds to our teacher's voice. We laugh and a bluejay imitates our laughter. I feel so connected to these women now.

We are instructed to form a circle around four women in the center who are to beat on a large red drum which has conveniently appeared. It looks like the caja chayera Mari sent me a few years before.

"With our arms around each others' shoulders, let us slowly, in unison, move toward the drummers led by our tongues." The comforting voice of our leader moves into me like a warm current. We thrust our tongues towards the drumming women and begin to move towards each other slowly.

My dream fades as the circle of women enfold like petals of a flower around the red drum and the four drummers. I fall then into a very restful sleep.

I could say I quilted a relationship from the materials of our love: our shared moments, her letters, my dreams and visions. The times we clung, the times we tugged, pulled, burst out lively, green, growing were etched in the quilt in brilliant colors. Our separations made up the darker backgrounds of the quilt, serving to enhance the images of our connections all the more. I wrap myself in this quilt and in making love to myself, I make love to Mari. Fantasy fruit is very beautiful and serves well to stimulate the senses in the absence of our lovers. But is it my needs or Mari's look, that imploring look she gave me in the airport, that look which says 'hold me to your life,' which welds me to her?

I cannot let Mari go. I cannot let the fruit of our love drop from the vine. If I let her go, if I were to connect to another, *Mari will be harmed. Mari will die. Mari is living in an extremely dangerous situation.* My dreaming, wanting, thinking Mari not only keeps her close to me but keeps her alive and protected. I believe she has asked me with this look to do so for her and that is what I do. Out of anxiety and uncertainty and out of caring I construct something solid, real and knowable. With me she will be safe.

* * *

Bzzz, bzzz, bzzz.

The fly is out to drive me mad. I know it. Why can't I move my arms to stop it? It wants to invade me. I must cover my ears. Where are they? It knows my thoughts. Round and round my head it goes. I can't stand it touching my hair. This tickling torture is death.

Bzzz, Bzzz, Bzzz.

Help! I can't take this anymore. Help!

"What do you want from me?" My voice explodes me awake from a stiffling, afternoon nap. I'm in my studio on Fifth Avenue. It's summer. There is no fly. The buzzer on my intercom is crying into the thick heat.

Oh my God, someone's downstairs.

I pull on the cotton shirt thrown off carelessly in my sleep. "I'm coming. Hold your horses!" My finger finds a black button

on the plastic box beside the door.

The box starts to speak. "Where are you, Judith?"

"Hello? Hello?" I say. "Hello!"

"Judith, where were you? It's me. I've been standing here for twenty minutes shouting into this thing. Didn't you hear me? Hurry up. I've got to go to the bathroom."

"Who are you? You sound just like my sister."

"It is your sister. Let me in."

I push all the buttons at once.

"Meredith, what in Sam Hill are you doing here?" I shout.

She does not respond.

My god, Meredith, my twin sister, is climbing up the eighty-eight steps to my studio.

I find some pants to put on, then run to the bathroom to splash water on my face and run a comb through my hair. When I give the room a hasty once over to see if there is some semblance of order I think, 'Oh Jesus, she won't like it.' But it's too late. She'll have to take it as it is.

At the stair landing outside my door I look down on a small figure pulling itself up the endless grey steps.

"You're almost here. Keep going," I call out.

She looks up at me. I have familiar feelings that are still strange. Am I seeing someone I might have been had one gamete burst into my egg rather than hers? Can I still remember back in my brain cells to the time when those first momentous chemical decisions took place? Though we are not replicas, we share many of the same genes. We are extensions, variations on themes.

Once we were two little birds each in our own egg, who shared the same warm nest. How were we about sharing then? Did I take up my half of the space or did I curl into myself so as to not offend her? Or did I stretch this way and that, pushing my sac against hers? And did she tighten herself against me?

We came out of the same dark womb to suckle the same wet breasts. I wonder did we ever bump and bite each other, vying for the same nipple? Did we cuff and spit for rattles and shak-

ers? Did I sometimes suck her thumb, thinking it was mine?

How did we learn boundaries when we always shared a room, a closet, a mirror, a large oak dresser, divided in half with identical drawers on either side. We each had our own twin bed but with the same satin spreads. Her toothbrush, shaped like mine, was always yellow, the blue one was mine. Her pajamas had the flowers; the striped ones were mine. We each wanted the other to have what we had; yet, we each wanted our own things.

Would I feel differently if we had been raised as sisters, not as twins?

She is not a lover who is returning, though I have *known* her as with all members of my first commune, my blood family, in deep unconscious dreams. And in times of unrest, all my lovers, male and female alike, have had to endure hearing me call them by her name.

When she slips into my room, my cells again, will the I that I think is I be shaken? Or will I ease into some peace as I look upon her, my own? Will I know again that though I have no child, I am not alone? She will not attract and pull me as a lover does for there is no conscious desire to become one; we have already been joined. The tension between us comes from our lifelong dance that tests and tries how close, how far, do we want to now become.

Oh see us dance back to the small white house on Westover Street with the long red steps where we first felt the joy of hot afternoons. Oh hear us on long sleepless nights telling silly stories about everyone we know. We speak English; we don't have a secret tongue. Oh smile at us as you would at any paired animals groping about with our four eyes, our two noses, two mouths, our eight limbs. We are sister twins! Forever and ever, until death do us part. Amen.

There is this person standing in the doorway looking as though she owns me. "I thought you'd never answer," she says. She does not embrace me.

"Why are you here? You live in California."

"Can't people from California come to New York? I told you

one of these years...."

"I know but...."

"Where's the bathroom?" She goes where I point her, leaving me alone with my new, old identity: *one of the twins.*

When Meredith comes out of the bathroom, we stare at each other mutely for some time, checking each other out. She has bright red lips and purple eye shadow; I must look pale in comparison. Her dark hair in soft curls around her face, looks too perfect—I hate to say it, like a wig. Her big brown eyes still have that frank, friendly look I hardly ever see in the city any more. Her face though seems drawn, worried. She's still a little taller, a little thinner than me.

She starts to rock on her feet. I feel my own body shaking.

"What's the matter, Judith? Why are you laughing?"

"I'm not laughing, you are." I realize both our bodies are shaking with laughter or muffled sobs. I can't tell which. Tears are rolling down my cheeks.

A magnetic force neither of us understands whips us together, face to face. We embrace.

"God, it's so funny," I say. "You're so different than me. You've become another person again."

"What does that mean? I am another person. Who did you want me to be? You?" She has retrieved a kleenex from her smart leather shoulder bag and is dabbing her eyes and nose.

"Well, so how do I look?" she asks.

"Like my sister," I answer. "Let's relax, Meredith. After all, it has been a while since I saw you last. Right?"

"This time it's been three years, six months and ten days to be exact. That was at father's seventy-fifth birthday celebration. Are you still growing cabbages? That was a riot, bringing your own home-grown vegetables like they were gold."

"I remember you got a kick out of that. I miss not having a garden. But, why are you here? I'm in shock; you should have told me you were coming."

"Rico and I are on a little vacation. We're staying at St. Moritz —rooms overlooking the park."

"Well, la-de-da."

"So how's Josh? Do you two ever see each other?"

"Once in a while. He lives uptown on the Upper West Side on Riverside Drive."

"Oh, fancy, huh? He must be selling his writing."

"He's doing okay."

"Judith, can I ask you something?"

"I guess so. Is this an interview?"

"Is Josh's family wealthy?"

"In some ways, but not the way you mean."

"I mean money-wise."

"No, hardly. He's a native of Bensonhurst; that's a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn. His father drove a cab for fifty years; his mother worked as a caterer."

"He always seemed so relaxed about money, so free with it."

"That's just part of his nature—to be generous."

"It's funny. I thought all New York Jewish people were rich. I wonder where I got that idea?"

"Maybe you got it from Centerville, Ohio. I mean, we didn't exactly get a complete and accurate picture of the world would you say from living there?"

"I didn't know Italians from Norwegians from living there."

"I know, but we sure learned who the Jewish families in town were and the blacks were kept out of town."

"That's true. I forgot to tell that to Sal. Oh, I wish I wasn't so pooped." She sighs heavily. "Why don't they have an elevator in this building?"

"I've often wondered that myself." The flat, open, ingenuous tone in her voice is so familiar. It's the mid-west sound. She looks as honest as the day is long as we would say. My roots are in the room with me, though I must admit she looks a bit uprooted here. Her white summer dress seems too clean, too pressed, like finding a nurse's uniform on sale in Macy's basement. Her eyes scan the room with a curious yet critical glint.

"What are you looking for, Meredith?" My voice sounds suspicious, tightly wrapped around old hurts. That woman in front of me has insulted me so many times, by not accepting me and my choices. I won't let her hurt me this time.

"I can't believe it," she says. She sounds almost giddy, girlish, like a girl starched into a woman's body. Or is it like a woman held by a girl's innocence? I can't help the rise of tender feelings towards her along with immense hurt .

"What, Meredith? Tell me."

"You've got some furniture."

I look around the room with her. The couch, the hand-made desk, the telephone cable spool which serves as dining room table, the chairs, all seem too exposed, too nude under her gaze. Even my bird mask over the fireplace is affected by her glance. Its usual stunning aura has almost an apologetic shade. The eyes arch now like unanswered questions.

"Did you finally decide to become civilized like the rest of us?"

She just threw cold water on my face, that's what she did. I consider sticking my tongue out at her.

"Oh, this chair is beautiful. Where did you get it?"

She is ogling my white wicker chair with the blue cushions.

"I found it on the street and I painted it and made the cushions. Do you like it?"

"It's darling. Can I sit in it?"

"If you want to have a fantasy you can. It's my dream chair."

The chair gets a once over before she places herself neatly into it. I watch her close her eyes, probably tying up neat little packages of thoughts.

"Be my guest," I say as an afterthought.

"Do you have something cold to drink?" Her sweet, almost coy voice bubbles up in little blue clouds from the chair.

"I've got some apple juice and some seltzer."

"Do you have any white wine, from California of course."

"Wait a minute, I think I do."

Good, she wants this to be a friendly get together. Wine will mellow us out a bit.

"Great, here's a half bottle of Almaden Chablis. How about if I mix half wine and half seltzer?" She nods okay and I make two tall drinks.

"Um," she says, taking one of the glasses and kicking off

black patent leather sandals. "Could we turn the fan on?"

"Do you mean, could I turn the fan on? Sure, anything else, Sis, before I sit down?"

"Don't worry," she says with a mother's caring tone, "I wait on you when you come to my house, remember?"

As I sit down on the couch near her, she flashes me a smile and a wink with the assured air of an older sister.

"Um," she says, "this tastes so good. I'm glad you were at home. Did you know your number's not listed? I couldn't call you."

"Oh, that's right. They disconnected my phone last spring. I got a new number. Didn't I send it to you?"

"No, you didn't. But it's okay. I'm used to not knowing where you are by now."

"I'm sorry, Meredith."

"No, you're not. But forget it. Oh, my legs hurt from that walk up."

"Rub the calf muscles, that helps."

"I'm getting old," she says, drawing her legs underneath her. "I was trying to describe the neighborhood on Westover Street to Sal. He had to write a paper on his roots. Let's see, who were our neighbors now? We had the McKinneys across the street; they were Irish. Remember their dog we used to call Nosey? And let's see, the Holtz family was next to us on the right. German, but French German. They were kind of strange. And there was Michael Jones and his Mom and Dad on the left of us - he was always looking into our bedroom window. I guess they were English. There was a real mixture of cultures right in our neighborhood, but who talked about it. All that seemed important was what job the man in the household had at the Burroughs Plastic Company. It's like people didn't enjoy each other that much. What a shame."

"I didn't know you felt that too, Meredith. God, do we have a lot to talk about."

"Oh, before I forget, I want to show you what I brought you for your birthday. See I didn't forget this time."

She reaches for her purse.

I'm not going to apologize for not having something for her. How many years in a row did I send her either something I'd made or something beautiful for her house? I must admit, she always sent me a thank you note.

"Here, open it up."

She hands me a beautifully wrapped box, the size that earrings or rings come in.

"It's okay, you can rip the paper, Judith."

"But, its so beautiful."

"There's more where that came from. Go on."

I'm forced to rip the gold paper smothered in dainty blue forget-me-nots. I lift off the cover of the box enclosed; it's small, red with the feel of velvet.

"Do you like them?"

Inside are two green jade earrings which look like tiny monarch butterflies. "I can't believe this, Meredith. Gorgeous butterflies!"

"Those aren't butterflies, Silly. Those are bows. As in buttons and bows. Aren't they darling?"

"Yes, really, Meredith, they are cute. Thanks, that was sweet of you. Of course, they're bows. I think I have butterflies on the brain."

"I can see how you'd get butterflies on the brain, isolating yourself on this barren mountaintop. I think I would die living alone up here."

I don't know whether to laugh or cry at this comment. I wish I had more wine in the fridge.

"You must miss nature, Judith. I feel sorry for city people, being cut off like that from the land."

"I've seen the most fantastic butterflies you could imagine or I should say, 'that I could imagine,' right here in this room."

"Wouldn't you rather see real ones?"

"I've seen other real things that look like butterflies in this room."

"Yah, like the earrings I gave you?"

"Okay, like the earrings you gave me." She needs to not get what I'm talking about. "You're right, I'd rather see real butter-

flies than imaginary ones if I had my choice. We can't live on imagination alone."

"I know what I'm going to do. Next birthday, I'm going to give you some butterfly earrings, if you promise to go where there are real butterflies to keep you company. Is that a deal?"

"I know you're concerned about me, Meredith. But sometimes artists have to isolate themself from the very thing they need, in order to understand it better."

"Well, I wouldn't want to do that."

"So you're lucky you found a nice small town to live in near L. A. I appreciate your concern, really. Anyway, where did you get the earrings?"

"I got them at Gumps. You can wear them to work. You are working now aren't you?"

"As a matter of fact I'm doing typesetting on night shifts and weekends so I can take some extra vacation at the end of the summer or in September. Maybe do some gigs out of the city then. The city is driving me nuts again."

"That reminds me. Where's *our* marimba? I want to look at it."

"It's in those black cases by the window. I haven't unpacked it from my last gig."

"Oh, nuts, I wanted to see it."

"I could unpack it, if you want. It'll just take a few minutes."

"Oh forget it. I only have an hour before I have to get back uptown. Rico's conference ends at five o'clock and then we're meeting old friends for dinner and the theater."

"I'd like to send you a tape of my last concert. Would you be interested to hear it?"

"I bet the boys would like to listen to it."

"I'm asking if *you'd* like to hear it?"

She moves her head in a non-commital way that could mean either yes or no.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"It was a spur of the moment kind of thing. You always tell me to be spontaneous."

"What are you seeing?"

"*A Chorus Line.* I'm so excited. We've been wanting to see it since it opened. "

"I wish you had told me when you were coming. There's a terrific musical at the Judson Church. It's a take off on the Joan of Arc story, but it's a modern day feminist version with great music."

"That's okay, Rico wanted to see *Chorus Line.* This trip is for him."

"Oh." Why do I still hope that Meredith will have interest in the same things I'm interested in? I should ask her if she ever got into a women's consciousness raising group. Then she'd ask me if I ever did and then I could tell her something about the women's music network.

"Judith, I'm talking to you! You never really want to know about him."

"Who, Rico? How is he doing these days."

"Do you really want to know, or are you just being polite?"

"Meredith, I think we both could improve on at least pretending we wanted to know more about each other's life. I've learned a whole lot about the art of keeping boundaries and yet being interested in the other person. Boy, do twins have problems in that area. Let's not judge each other any more. I had enough of people crawling into my mind and leaving me with their psychic fleas. Did I ever tell you about this twin I got to..."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I just wanted to tell you about Rico. Can you listen or not?"

I watch her set her glass down and clasp her hands, as if they need each other, as if doing so makes her feel more composed, whole. I know the gesture; its exactly what I do when I feel particularly upset. My hands also find each other now. She seems to bend in on herself as well, moving inward for fetal protection. I stretch myself up tall on the couch, determined not to ape her every move.

"I think there's something wrong with him. But it isn't physical. He's had all kinds of tests. They can't find anything."

"What do you mean? What's wrong with him?"

"He's depressed. All the time. Nothing excites him. Not even

me and I like to be wanted."

"I know what you mean."

"Except he's proud of the boys once in a while."

"Where's he working these days?"

"He's still with that medical consulting firm I think I told you about that. But mainly it seems like he's given up. He just says how everybody's fucking up the earth, destroying everything. He's obsessed with all the pollution around L.A. We're out of the city so we don't get it so bad."

"That must be rough. Maybe he needs an anti-depressant. They really do help people who are chronically depressed. But I know how he feels. Our environment is being terribly fucked up."

"That's just it. He won't see a psychiatrist. He won't really admit to himself that he has a problem. He says, what do I want from him. He does his work. He takes care of the yard. At least now he is bringing in half the money. If he wants to watch the TV and complain what's to stop him, he says. Sometimes I think I should just stop worrying about him and deal with my problems. "How are you, Meredith?"

"God, Judith, don't sound so serious, I'm not dying. It's okay. Something's changing in my life. Maybe because the boys are older. Mario's in his senior year in college. And Sal is going to UCLA this fall. And I won't be a Mom any more." She chokes back tears on the word *Mom.*

"Oh, Meredith, poor baby." I move instinctively towards her, fumbling to either pat her head or put my arm around her shoulders. But before I can comfort her, her thin body stiffens. If she had screamed, "Don't touch me," I could not have felt more rejected.

"I think it's a good thing you live on one coast and I live on the other. That gives us a lot of room to be ourselves," I say stiffly.

"Just don't call me baby, Judith."

"God, Meredith, I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything by that. I was just being affectionate. I feel for you. I really do."

"You should. I'm your sister. Just listen to me. That's all."

"Okay, okay. That's what I'm doing."

"I know you've gone through a lot of changes. Separating from Josh and all."

"Do you need some more to drink?"

"Just a little bit more. Where is it? Let me get it this time."

"Okay. Look in the door of the ice box. Everything you need is there."

"*Ice box*? I can tell where you come from."

"Sure, Centerville, the center of the world, where reality is prescribed by neat little rules and the actual experience of life is suspect. Can you find everything?" I have to contain myself to not call out directions to her. I immediately understand why mothers boss others so much in their kitchens. They really want to say, ' Stay out of my territory.'

"Here's your drink. Enjoy. I like your glasses," she says with another wink.

"Oh great, you found the napkins, too. Thanks, Meredith." I can relax with her a bit now. She really is a pretty woman, with open, generous features very much like mine. But her face is fuller, less intense. My hair is brown and her hair, like right now against the blue velvet of the chair, looks jet black like our mother's.

"Did I ever tell you my theory about you, Judith?"

"No. Do you think I can take it?"

"I don't know. I'm going to give it to you though." She rearranges herself more comfortably in the chair before continuing. "It seems to me that all of this"—a sweep of her arm is meant to include my whole room into her observation. "Oh, look at those masks! I didn't notice them before. They're fascinating. Kind of scary."

"We used those in the street theater."

"Oh right, you told me about your gypsy days."

"My 'Stop the War in Vietnam' days, you mean, Meredith."

"That's what I mean—all of this, the masks, the used furniture. Don't you think this is your rebellion against our mother? You know when you were a kid, you were either so goody-goody or you were crying for her. You couldn't even stay over at some-

body else's house without me having to comfort you, or else Mom had to come and take us both home. I really resented that."

"This is me trying to be creative without very much money."

"Well, that's your choice. You have a Master's degree in art. You could be teaching."

"Let's not tell each other how to live. But back when we were little, I didn't mean to be such a baby. Everybody must have treated me like *the baby.*"

"That's right. You were the baby, not me. Mom really spoiled you. You did everything she wanted you to do, then. But now?"

"She's a powerful woman in her way."

"Powerful my eye. She's a manipulative witch."

"She ain't no angel. That's for sure."

"We were just visiting them. Mom was just impossible."

"I didn't know that."

"Mom was just impossible."

"Living with Dad can't be all that great. He always puts a pipe wrench into her enthusiasm. Actually, they both bottle each other up emotionally. They need us kids around to get out their shit."

"Well, she sure did act out."

"What happened?"

"Poor Rico was trying his best to be really helpful. He was really sweet. He asked if he could make an Italian meal for them. He's a great cook."

"Yah, I know."

"Mother asked him in that accusing voice she has, what he wanted to cook. And then without waiting for him to tell her, she says, 'I don't want any garlic in my kitchen.' "

"She has a thing against garlic. She loves onions but she hates garlic. What is it? "

"Maybe we don't want to know."

"Yah, maybe we don't."

"So Rico says, 'I won't use garlic, but I want to make linguini with red clam sauce.' "

"'Oh no,' she says. 'We don't want that in our kitchen do we

Dad?' Poor Dad didn't know what to say. He felt caught in between. You would have thought that Rico was trying to sell her a picture of Marilyn Monroe nude. "' The last time I let somebody use my stove' she says, 'there was spaghetti sauce all over the wall and in the stove.' 'But Mom,' I say, 'Rico's just trying to be helpful.' 'That's very kind of you, Rico,' she says—she didn't mean it—' but Father will take us all out for dinner, won't you father?' We ended up going to a new Kentucky Chicken place in town. Can you imagine?"

"It must have been terrible, though I think I do understand why women get very bossy about their kitchens."

"Why?" she asks.

"It's one of the few places they can show their power and have it be accepted."

"Well, I can't buy that. So I say, 'What about the club, Mom,?' 'No, we're taking you there for your birthday luncheon, Meredith. This is your father's plan.' I hate the way she doesn't even take responsibility for herself. Can you imagine? And they didn't invite Rico or the boys to go to the club on my birthday. I almost didn't go, but then I thought, Oh, what the heck, I only see them once a year anyway. But when they come out to visit us—we wine and dine them. I just don't get it. They won't give sometimes. And after all we spent on airfare to get there. Rico's folks are so much more accepting of people. They think Mom and Dad are very judgemental."

"Look, Mom and Dad have their good points. Don't forget that. They hold their own. I appreciating them more and more."

"You hardly ever go see them, Judith."

"I'm appreciating them from a distance. It's hard to have other people come into your house. You never know what they're going to say about it. Right, Meredith?"

"How come you always defend them, especially Mother? Why can't you just call a spade a spade? Do you realize they wouldn't tell people you were married to a Jewish person? In fact, I don't think they told people you were married at all."

"They were ahead of me. Come on, Meredith, we've got to joke about some of this." When I make a funny face by tucking

my upper lip up and showing my teeth in a grimace I see that she has made exactly the same face.

"Introducing the Wallerby twins," she croons and both of us burst into fits of nervous laughter.

"Okay, so now that we know a spade is a spade." I wriggle my lips back into place. "She can be a pill at times. Remember the time she caught us sifting through McIntyre's garbage pails, speaking of pills. And we found boxes of orangecolored little pills that we thought were M & M candies? How she dragged us home, one in each hand, flying down the sidewalk? She spanked us both even though we said we didn't eat them. She just wanted to teach us a lesson for the future. That was one of the few times she spanked us."

"That's right, we weren't battered children, maybe a little manipulated. They told us what to do instead of ask us what we wanted. I remember that time. She said we were really going to get it from Father when he came home, so we hid in the basement, in the little cellar behind the windows over the ping pong table. Remember that?"

"Oh, that was my favorite hiding place," I say.

"And we stayed there until it got dark and then we got hungry and scared. And you probably started bawling for Mother."

"Come on, I didn't always do that, Meredith! They were so glad to see us that they forgot to spank us."

"I think we all went out for ice cream cones at Jones' dairy after supper. See, they weren't all that mean."

"I know, just uptight."

"They wanted to do their jobs well."

"Exactly. In their way, they were dedicated parents," I say.

"It's just too bad they couldn't have been more relaxed about it. Had more fun in those days."

"But it was great how we used to stick together during times like those. What are you looking at?"

"Who's that on the wall by the desk?" she asks.

"Oh, that's a friend of mine."

"You always say that word, *friend*, as if you were talking about a fantastic, secret person."

"I do?"

"Yes, you do."

"Maybe I say it like you say *my kids* , like you have the exclusive right to them."

She ignores my response as she goes to the photographs. They are photos of Mari. She focuses on the one showing us together, leaning towards each other smiling.

"I guess you know her quite well."

"I like to think I do. She's a special friend."

"What do you mean, *special* friend?"

"It's hard to describe. She lives on the other side of the world. It's not like I call her up every day or anything like that. I just wish...." My voice has caught in my throat. In one more second I will be sobbing. I can't let that happen. Meredith won't understand.

"Where is she from, France?"

"Argentina."

"How exotic."

"Yes and no. The political situation there is very frightening."

"How did you meet her?"

"We met through a friend of Josh's who thought we would like each other."

"Oh." She turns away from the wall and goes back to the chair, immediately diving into her purse.

I get a hold of myself with a long drink of wine. "She speaks Spanish you know, Meredith, and I don't, so we sometimes have a hard time communicating. So we make faces and act out, that kind of thing. You might say we're playful together."

"You know, could I say something, Judith?"

I didn't think she was listening to me.

"Did you ever think that you treat your friends like your children. Everybody needs a family. You and Josh should have had a kid."

"I did think of that. She's a fantastic person. She lived here, in this room, with me. Now she lives in Argentina and the situation is very, very dangerous there."

Meredith's attention is now focused on a small date book.

"It was fun trying to tell her about life in the mid-west, growing up there. Like how every spring we dug little holes in the earth and played marbles. Remember, Meredith?"

"Sorry. I had to check where I was meeting Rico." The date book is put away. I have her attention again.

"Oh, I remember that," she says. "We were good at it. Didn't we always divide up our loot at the end of the day?"

"I don't remember that. But also mumbletypeg. That was the one game I always beat you at."

"Mumbletypeg? What's that?"

"You don't remember? The game with the knife?"

"I never played with knives. Maybe you did. You did lots of things I didn't do. You used to sneak away whenever we had to help mother cook for the holidays. You left me alone in the house; I remember now. You just disappeared. Where did you go?"

"I probably went to Davey Johnson's garage. Remember Davey? He loved to play spy and detective. He always wore the neatest black gloves. It was amazing how many kids couldn't take being in their houses on those family gatherings, just like me. Didn't you ever come with me? We felt like the outcasts. I don't know what we did. Probably played doctor and nurse."

"But why didn't you tell me where you went? You always said you just took a walk around the block. I always thought you were running away from our chores."

"No, just getting away from the tension in the house. I couldn't tell you because I felt guilty, like I was betraying you by having my own friends. Didn't you ever feel guilty if you loved somebody as much as me?"

"I never had a problem with it."

"Besides you were always busy fixing your nails or your hair. I didn't think you missed me that much, you know."

"But that's so sad."

"Look, I think twins have a very complex set of feelings to deal with when it comes to making relationships with other people. Don't you? I want to tell you about a twin I met about three years ago. It was the first time I really talked to another twin

about being one. In some ways it was fantastic. But in other ways it was dreadful. It's all about keeping boundaries and respect. It was incredible how much I didn't understand before then how being a twin..."

"How come you always put down our being twins! I'm proud of it. Why can't you just accept that we are twins?" Her direct look is completely candid and disarming.

"I didn't think I was doing that, Meredith. I'm just aware that we feel uptight about each other. Why can't we talk about that?"

"I don't really have the time to think that much about it right now. That all seems like the past. I have my family to take care of. You're so serious, Judith. I forgive you for running away from me. You can have your own friends. It's okay."

"I didn't know you missed me that much, Meredith."

She looks at me with a forced smile on her face. It's like she's making a brave smile for my sake. Her eyes are clouded over.

"Oh, Meredith, I wish we lived closer."

"Why? You seem to do all right without me." She has that 'don't touch me,' look in her eye again. Boy, she's tough. She can't decide whether to eye the photos of Mari again or my well-worn couch. She picks the couch. "Except you could use help decorating this place," she says.

"I forgot to tell you the name of my friend from Argentina. It's Mari. Like your Mari. But she's a woman Mari."

"No kidding, Judith." The sound of ice clinking in her glass unnerves me along with her sardonic tone. "That's the Mari you told me about on the phone one time," she adds quickly to warm me up a few degrees.

"I did? I don't remember that." A tight feeling in my chest makes me want to let out a scream or shout. But I say calmly, "Let's have a half glass more of the wine. Are you hungry?"

"A little, but I'm meeting Rico soon. Remember?"

"How come he didn't come with you?"

"He thinks sisters should have time alone together."

"That's really thoughtful of him."

"Besides I told him he couldn't come. I don't get to see my

twin very often."

"Oh, I see," I say.

I find some Vermont cheddar in the refrigerator, some hot Italian peppers, green peppers and crackers. Very soon a plateful of hors d'oeuvres appears.

"Something's happening between us," she says.

"Between who, Meredith?"

"Between Rico and me."

"What do you mean?"

"There's like a wall coming between us. I just can't fit into the old ways any more and he doesn't like it."

"Maybe that's why he's depressed."

"For example, I needed my own car, one registered in my name. I drive to work every day. This disturbs him. Can you believe it? Like I'll drive away and leave him. Maybe the women libbers are getting to me."

"Worse things could happen to you. So you're just being strong and independent. Is that it?"

"Something like that. But I don't want to be alone or open all my own doors and pay all the bills. And I'm too old to have a roommate again. There's a limit to this kind of thing."

"Meredith, you know, I'd like us to be closer. I mean at least emotionally. I think I understand us better. We have to stop wanting the other one to be like us. Then we could just enjoy our differences,don't you think? In some ways I wish I was more like you. Cooler about things. I'm too anxious. And it seems like you're reaching out to me. You know, you were very cruel to me a few times. I have a theory why you had to be mean to me."

"Oh poor thing. Where does it hurt?"

"Don't be sarcastic. I'm talking to you. I think you needed to hurt me because you were hurt by Mother's affinity towards me. You know, we've never talked about how Mom picked me as her favorite and Dad picked you. But I guess we don't have time to talk about that right now."

"No, we don't. I don't think I can take the drama today, frankly."

"You always ask me about Josh, but you hardly ask me

about me, about my life now. Except perfunctorily. You don't seem to really want to know me in some ways. Do you see how you need to ignore me?"

"I know you. I lived with you for eighteen years."

"But do you know me?"

"What's the big secret, Judith?"

"Look, I haven't been alone for all the years after Josh and I separated."

"So?"

"It's important for you to know this."

"Come on, Judith, spill it. I've got to leave in two minutes."

"I've not just been with men. I'm with women too. I'm bi-sexual."

She looks perplexed, frightened, put off.

"I don't see any men's pictures on the wall, Judith."

"Okay, so now I'm just with women."

"There's a word for that you know? But I don't want to hear it."

"Yes, I make love with women. I sleep with women. Do you understand?"

She turns away from me, pulls her bag onto her lap, takes a deep breath, then zaps me.

"That's disgusting," she says, looking me straight in the eye.

I watch some terrifying image work its way through her body, like a snake; she tightens up against it. All looseness from the wine has left her.

I have difficulty breathing. My jaw clenches.

"I don't think you're disgusting, but it's disgusting to do that," she says.

"Meredith, you can never listen to me. What does it mean to say you're proud of us being twins if you can't accept me?"

"I don't want to hear any more."

She has cut off my oxygen supply.

"Anyway, it's been lovely," she says. She rises woodenly. "Thanks for the cold drink and hors d'oeuvres. I'm glad I got to see your place. I love this chair." She pats it.

"Can't we do something tomorrow? I'd love to take you and

Rico out to lunch. Maybe in Soho?"

"Oh, we're going to be gone. We've been here for three days and that's enough. We're going to visit Jonathan and Sally in Boston."

I suddenly feel jealous that she is closer to our brother. "I didn't know that."

"How could you? I didn't tell you."

"My own brother and sister-in-law never call me. I don't even think of him as my brother any more."

"Do you call them? "

"I used to."

"Well, maybe you have to change your life style. You are a bit too radical for all of us. Remember my theory. Try to fit in with others. You seem to look for trouble as if trouble didn't already come looking for us."

"Listen, Meredith. It takes two to be friends."

"There you go with that word again."

"To communicate."

"Look, I've got all I can handle with my two kids and a husband."

"Can't Mario and Sal visit me? They like me."

"Well, you can reach out to them, you know. I'm not stopping you or them."

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"Listen, I really have to go. They are waiting for me."

"I'm so glad you came. Let's keep in touch more." I'm clutching my fists to hold back my tears. I can't believe she can be so cold to me. She doesn't hug me goodbye.

"I'll say hello to the boys for you."

"Would you?"

"Sure. And send me your tape."

She slips out the door, almost tripping on the police bar set on an angle between door and floor. I hear her sandals slapping against the steps.

Somewhere on the stairway she calls out to me in a singsong voice, "Judith, I can't help it. I just love my guys. They're my family!"

"Oh, Jesus, Meredith. You fucking jerk haven't understood anything I meant!" The words bounce back to me probably unheard as the door springs shut. I turn back to my room, numb.

Mari's eyes, burning out from one of the photos are the only source of life in what now feels like a dead, joyless space, filled with pathetic furniture and macabre papier-máché masks.

* * *

13 de Septiembre, Buenos Aires

Dear Judith,

You did not answer me, the last letters. I write and write and still no answer. But I will come to your city on the 15 de Septiembre.

Could you to meet me at the airport. In your morning. There is only one flight to arrive from New Orleans where I come from.

I tell you all about my visit and I am afraid you cannot support that.

But I need that you be there for me. I have tryt to call you but seem no one answer and I am staying at house without a phone right now. If you cannot come to the airport, I will take a taxi and go to a cheap hotel in the midtown.

I will call you from there. It is so much better for me if you are there to meet me.

Mari

My Mari, my darling, my love, my own. My body and soul are returning to me. Mari, the woman of my dreams, the substance of my life is coming to me in two days. Mari, my person, my hands, my face, my child, my lover, my sister, my mother, my friend, my family, my self, my life, my thought, my food, my joy, my laughter, my struggle, my pain, my reward. Oh Mari, my song, my wonder, my fear, my own Mari.

I have filled our separation with visions of togetherness. I have made a beautiful home for us filled with suggestive images where you have space to fill in with your needs, your wisdom. I have decorated your fingers with butterfly rings, your ears with crystals, your ankles with beads. I have woven a protective net

around your thoughts and words. I have asked your mother for your hand, your body, your life. She has finally understood my strength. I have not forgotten the pain I once caused you; I will heal those old wounds. You are my holy and human love. I have remembered your passion and I have kept mine for you. I have dared to be in love with you. I have learned how to love you.

Mari is coming to unite with me. God is giving me this great gift of her. This time I am ready for her. I know her. I have understood our differences; I have joyed in our similarities. Mari is the companion I deserve.

My house has been scrubbed clean. It looks sore with rubbing. Breads, fruits, vegetables, cheeses fill the refrigerator. There is enough food for a dozen returning lovers. There is wine from Argentina, coffee from Brazil, nuts from Peru. This is a home. We will toast our sacred union. Candles are placed on all the places you have known: the tiled hearth, the old piano, the radiator—remember how its sputterings gave the house a voice for you! Here is a desk where you can write.

Your plane will be arriving in just a few moments. My heart is in my mouth. My head is pounding. My hands are cold. I am numb. I am afraid. I am not me. I am tranquillized. Everything is in order. I have the perfect rose to give you. I am yours.

"Oh, look, Judith. She is hurted." Mari stands in front of me and begins calmly tracing the broken stem of the rose I hold.

I stare at my flower, feeling that I cup splintered glass. The rose has collapsed. It has just leaned over and snapped.

We hardly embrace. We ride back to the city in a strange vacuum. She only stays with me a few nights; the rest of the time she stays with Josh on the Upper West Side. We are not comfortable in close quarters together. She is not the Mari I imagined. I have wedded myself to my constructed Mari, my work of art Mari. And three and a half years have coated her with an unfamiliar patina.

There is no self-conscious grin she borrows from childhood to please me. There are no adoring eyes which hold me like handcuffs. There is no open face to nest in. There is no Mari, my Mari.

When she told me calmly that she did not want me to touch her in a sensual way, but lie next to her as a sister would, I reacted as if she had spoken the unspeakable. I had not connected deeply, emotionally to anyone else during her absence. I had been faithful to her. I who preached change longed for constancy. I who had imagined us finding ourselves in each other's arms was stuck again with myself. There was never a forever.

There was no apology or hesitation in her voice when she said her body was still with Rhonda, a young woman she had slept with the night before in New Orleans. They had met only a few days before during her stay in Texas, where Mari had given several poetry readings. Rhonda had made her feel alive after a long period of spiritual and physical repression. There was no hesitation in my body either when I coiled away from her like a frightened snake. How could she have made love with someone she hardly knew? How could she have told me about it? I was not the North American who had stirred her sexually again.

Someone is screaming.

"Mari, you locked Sancha out in the hallway! I told you to be careful. You want my cat to die, don't you? The people on the third floor say they'll put her away for good if she pees on their doormat again."

I am screaming.

The tears she sheds do not act like other tears. They do not fall. They are like jewels stuck to the cheeks of a carved Jesus; they are covered with dust.

"I told you to be careful," I repeat not looking at her. My voice is cold, ice.

I am looking at my hands; they are so far away, so small as I say, "You are so careless with my life. You traipse in and out of it so unexpectedly, as if only you counted." I can feel my fingers moving across the scars in the wooden table.

"I didn't lock her out," she says. "I didn't. I didn't leave this room. You did, Judith when you ran out two hours ago."

I had run out on my celebration dinner for Mari, leaving her and Josh alone to reminisce. I must not have noticed Sancha

following me. But right now I can't hear Mari. I can't tell if her English has improved or not.

"Oh," I say. "Oh, I'm so sorry. Have you been here long?," speaking formally as if to a stranger. She is a stranger. She is not my Mari.

"There's no sorry, Judith. It's just the way life takes us."

"Won't you stay here more than two months?" I sound so hurt. "We won't have the time it takes to get to know each other again. We won't have a chance to be close ever again."

Mari eyes me squarely. "I wrote to you several letters talking about this. I tried to be clear and kind. I am so sorry that they didn't arrive to give you a chance to be with yourself about this. You would have had time to go to therapy to help you support the situation or you could have told me not to come to you. But I am only staying for two months."

Mari is very tall. I can hardly see her eyes. I am making horrible sounds. I am on the floor twisting and writhing. She is making strange distorted faces at me. She doesn't understand what I am saying because I am not making sense.

I hear someone talking. "This is killing me. I no longer want to yearn like this for another person who can't be with me. This is the most unreal love relationship I have ever known. One of these days I'll see you walk right through my door like a ghost. I'll see you, Mari and I'll put my hand right through your heart."

Mari is patting my head. I am crawling on all fours, a wounded animal.

My imagined shape of our relationsip has died. Its legs stuck straight up stiffly. Mari stands in front of me manifesting her own shape. All I have to call my own right now is the image of a dead cat.

The next day another letter arrived from Mari.

9 de julio Arroyo Felipe

My friend,

I needed to wait several days before write you. To quiet the storm of emotion your letter awake inside me. You are right in many ways, but seem that some time is one of your sides who

answer me and some time are the others, and they don't match with my own different selves, specially through letters.

Yes, Estella grew with my home in some way, but she is not my home. I have not that. I have only a bleed land and a destiny. I love her deeply, but I'm not in love with her, that mysterious thing, you awoke in me, creative love and passion, painful and joyful at same time. All the last month I was listening the tapes you send me and thinking intensely of you and of you and me together and thinking that maybe the renunciation that something inside me made, choosing be here and not there, with you—was too much, was not right.

I will try to tell you two things at the same time: One is a great news, almost still a secret we were working on with a feminist culture grant organizaiton. Still, I cannot say when. I will propose next Septermber, but I don't know what she will think about it. Yes, I might come to your country again.

This is the plan. I go to USA by two months. First I go to Louisiana where is this feminist organization and where I can study at a University there to learn more complete the English language structure. Also I can to give a series of readings in the south. Then I travel to New York and stay there the rest of the time. The cultural organization, Bridge Between Women, give me a grant to initiate a bridge between feminist writers of Argentina and the USA. For this work I can obtain a short visa. Part of my job is to expand my knowledge of the feminist poets and interview as many women as I can. But I will come for only 2 months that is sure. Maybe readings could be arrange for me there by someone in New York.

I know the most important thing for me is to meet you. But you need to help me. I will stay there only two months and after I will come back to Argentina where I decide to live. You love, you have nothing to do here. You will die living here, and I cannot stay in your country. I don't know if you want to meet me again knowing I will left you soon. Also is terribly painful for me, but nevertheless I want see you and hold you and talk you those weeks.

I never forget you my love, but time and distance and histori-

cal events make strange things in the heart of the people.

When I begin to write you, I have this Spanish folksong, very old in my mind.

De los alamos vengo, madre
De ver como los menea el aire.
De los alamos de Sevilla
De ver a la mi linda amiga.
De los alamos de Granada
De ver a la mi linda amada.

To make the words for you to sing would be something like this:

From the poplar groves, Mother, I return
Where the wind is shaking the branches.
From the poplars of Seville
Where I met my beautiful woman friend.
From the poplars of Granada
Where I was with my beautiful woman lover.

I almost stop my leather work because leather become so expensive and most of the people have not money to pay this kind of objets here now. So I only work by order now, when the people give me half of money by advance to buy the materials.

About the book of North American women poets in which I was working so long. The publisher answered me that I made a "magnificent job," and that they are great poets, but the book are not sufficiently commercial, so they will not publish it.

I want to know what do you think about all this. Please talk to me in an open way, sweet one.

Four months ago I promised to go to Brasil in March because I'm doing some works for a magazine with other people there. I have an offer to work and live there. I will go there, but will not left Argentina.

It is a hot midday now. A humming bird serenade the house. I go to talk by radio with X, then swim a little in the river, before

to begin my work. Te abrazo tieran, entranablemente mi querida. Quisiera cuidarte de todo male, quisiera cuidarte de mi.

Mari

* * *

It is one of the letters she has told me she had sent to warn me of her coming. It is two months late.

I convince myself that the published feminists she will meet and interview will use her. They will see her as an exotic, intriguing, mysterious person. They will abuse her child-like generosity. Morning, noon, and night they will call her for the facts on South America. Can she lecture in their classrooms? they will ask. Can she translate their poems? They will not appreciate her as I do.

Day after day she will have breakfast at the Laissez-Faire Restaurant with a different feminist star. Where will she get the money? She is not used to paying so much for conversation. She is learning to do business without me. I begin to see how calculating and even heartless she can be. I wish I had some of her shrewdness. She has skills she needs to survive and to thrive.

She will have to stay at Josh's place. I will avoid her for several days at a time even if she does call me. And if she presses me for intellectual, analytical conversations, while placing autumn leaves in the books the famous ones have given her, then I will tell her I am tired and must leave immediately. I will not compete with them for her admiration. I will not. And about her poetry readings. I will have to see if I can put my energy into that or not.

* * *

Slowly over the next days and weeks, we shift into an uneasy alliance. I try to play the part of a gallant old friend.

Mari and I ride in an old Chevrolet driven by Maya. I am sitting alone in the back. We are headed for Bennington, Vermont, where I will give a concert and Mari will give a poetry reading—ironically on the same night but at different places.

She is bragging about her country again. "Spring is just coming now in my land. Never is there anything as beautiful as our

spring. How can you stand the cold here? My whole body closes up when she is cold. Why do you want to suffer in the whiteness? In the icicles?"

Don't let her talk that way about your territory. Speak up. "I like seeing the trees bare down to their skeletons," I say. "I like to see what they really look like. In the winter, when I'm cold, I feel my bones." I try to ignore Maya, whose eyes seem more glued on Mari than on the road.

I continue, "Mari, don't you remember that time at Alice and Dora's house? How nice it was to sit with them around the fireplace, especially after playing in the snow? Only when you know cold can you really appreciate warmth. Don't you think?"

Mari is not hanging onto my every word.

Still I say, "I like to see the gray-haired people come out in the forest in winter," I continue with self-conscious animation. "And in the spring I like to see blood come up from the roots."

As I throw out images, she turns to Maya excitedly and whispers something in Spanish. Maya is majoring in Spanish literature and in Mari. She tries to ignore me. They melt and bubble together. I could use a warm wind to wrap myself in.

Maya is the one who will share my next to last night with Mari.

Mari has come again to leave me, I think over and over in rhythm with the turning wheels. I do not want to die when she leaves me again.

She still wears blue jeans. Are they the really good pair she bought at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street the first time she was here, or was it the second time? Or was it yesterday I watched her showing them off? Orange leaves rain down on the car windows.

This woman with the shy chin, the staring eyes that once spun into me, this enigma with the sun-moon face has not come to live with me. The stem of the rose cracked in my hands and that means her petals will no longer brush against mine. I must tell her that our growing season is over for good. We have both become grave diggers.

The car turns onto a dirt road. Fields on either side are filled with small, white butterflies and horses.

Once Mari pranced like a horse up my steps to see me. Today she walks solidly in her own shape. She has begun to root herself in her beloved soil. The night before I dreamt she was training a wild horse to gallop around and around a bird who kept opening its beak as if to sing. But all that came out of its beak were bits of gravel and glass and torn roses. Could I have been the bird that she imprisoned with her circling?

No one else is in sight. Maya stops the car at a white, wooden farmhouse. There is old farm equipment lying casually about. She says too gaily, "This is where I live. Make yourselves at home. I have to go to the college and make the arrangement for Judith's concert and for your reading, Mari. I'll be back in a few hours to pick you up. Better rest now."

Mari goes into the kitchen to make tea. I can't rest. I walk through Maya's house, checking out each of the rooms carefully as if looking for a clue to how to proceed. I feel confused. Concentration on my work has been difficult, so I've brought tape recordings of marimba and voice improvizations to listen to as preparation for the evening's concert. One of them is the last song I have been able to create, the song I made for Mari three and one half years ago. One hundred ninety-two weeks ago. One thousand, three hundred, forty-four days ago. I'll sing that song tonight:

. . .When I go to sleep at night
And I'm resting from the day,
Footsteps take me away.
Oh, its real to love a woman,
Yes, it's real. . .

I go into one of the rooms and begin to play the tape of this song for her. But the absurdity of playing this song about someone who is now with me overcomes me. When it gets to the part, "The stars are falling in her eyes," I cry, shut off the tape recorder and go to look for her, my sky animal.

The back door is open. She has left a clue. I know where to find her. Where the horses romp with the clouds and the butter-

flies take long rides on the backs of tortugas. My footsteps sound like bass drum beats as I walk on the dirt road.

I find her in the field. She is walking away from me. When I call out to her she stops and sits down on an old log. I go to her and sit beside her.

"I'm not in love with you any more, Judith." As she speaks, she does not look into my eyes. "I know myself. If I were still in love with you, or if I fell in love with you again, I would stay longer. And there is the work I must do in my country."

I hear a loud crashing sound. A branch from the tree where the horses had galloped has fallen just a few yards from us.

"You could have written to me how you felt."

"I wrote to you as much as I could. But you can see, the letters don't arrive and only one finally came. I tried to talk about it with you. But I didn't know until I got here."

"You mean when you saw me, your heart didn't bounce around in your chest and bells start to ring. Your crotch didn't blaze. The heavens didn't open and angels start singing, 'Alleluia.' What a bag of garbage! What the fuck do you think I am? Some object you can bounce your emotions off of? I thought we were way past that. That falling head-over-heels in love stuff. If we aren't in love with each other, then what is love and what is our relationship about anyway? I have given you my heart and soul for the last three and a half years. I haven't been able to write any songs during this time; all my creative energy went to you. I wanted you to be with me, my mate, for our life. What is this anyway?"

"I don't know," she says.

She shrinks before my eyes. She seems like a kid looking for an instant high. Immediate gratification. A star gazer, that's what she is. To her, being in love with someone means to feel complete ecstasy. She hasn't changed one bit after all. Except that I am not the source of her ecstasy. I hate it that she has some kind of power over me. The power to hurt me. Telling me she isn't in love with me any more seems as cruel as telling a child there is no Santa Claus. Can't she lie a little bit? Never will our mouths reach for each other again. Never will we find the sexual

embrace again. It's going to take more than one fifteen-minute crawling and screaming ritual to heal me.

Mari doesn't look at me. Her eyes are filling with water. An ocean separates us. I can't call my love Mari anymore. My taboo love once again has no name.

Self-pitying thoughts blow up into terrifying images. I watch a uniformed man plunge hot wires into the vaginas and penises of several blindfolded people strapped on metal-tables in a small airless cell. I watch myself run terrified from another uniformed man who is out to arrest me, arrest my love.

I flee to reeds by a small lake and hide.

Speech-like fragments fill my mind: Cage us, beat us, imprison us. Take away our homes, our salaries, our jobs, our rights, our children, our lovers, but you can never destroy the flowering of the human soul. I repeat, You can never destroy the flowering of the human soul!

"You came six thousand miles to tell me you aren't in love with me anymore? How insipid, you asshole," I whisper, feeling like a cricket with a broken leg.

"I came to see you again, Judith, and to do my work."

She is so together. I can't believe it. I am hiding other fears.

In one of the tapes I have received from Mari she said many Argentine citizens were being abducted by the military. Either their bodies or accounts of their torture turned up later. She said she had been in prison for a few weeks. She did not say if she had been tortured. The fear, the fact that someone I knew, loved, touched, might have been tortured was one I was incapable of comprehending or accepting. I am afraid to question her about this. Afraid of uncovering horrifying wounds.

Once I was driven to locate her psychically when I hadn't heard from her for four months. The silence between us was destroying me. On a simple wood altar I placed some things she had left behind: the sandals from Mexico made from rubber tires; a tan army shirt she had worn when we painted the apartment in Brooklyn; the doll I called Zorra, photographs, writings.

At this altar I meditated in candle light until I heard a voice say, "She is all right. She is with Uruguay." Mari was alive! She

was still some place on this earth. Months later I learned that Mari had become lovers and companions with Estella, who came from Uruguay and they shared a small cabin together. Whether that voice came from within, or whether it flew on electrical waves from far away to me, I didn't know. I knew that Mari was safe. Yet I still did not know if she had been tortured or not.

"Mari," I say softly to the woman from Argentina in front of me. "I'm going back to the house now and prepare for tonight's concert. We can talk more later."

* * *

For two hours I sing for an audience of a hundred-and-twenty women. They witness my visions, my vulnerabilities, my hopes, my wounds. I share my earth songs with them, dressed in a long red robe. Many young women seem both intrigued and frightened by the extent to which I reveal my emotions. My ardent flights as well as my inner subtleties are strange to them. Through long melodic passages and poetical imagery, I sail alone up and down the marimba, playing out my impressions. I express who I am, inspiring others to do the same.

As I sing the last words of the last song with mellow marimba sounds, a woman opens a small leather suitcase in front of me. By the time I have placed my blue yarn mallets in their holders on the side of the rosewood instrument and applause has disappeared into exuberant chatter, she has displayed an array of butterfly jewelry.

I kneel in front of her. Some of the pieces are so intricately wrought in colored stones I have to look at them twice to find the images of brilliant small insects in them. I look for her rings.

She begins to tell me about herself. "I've sold three bracelets, two sets of earrings and a setting for a necklace already. But no rings. They are waiting for you. I couldn't stop looking at you all evening. And it's so strange, I almost didn't bring the rings at all tonight. They have not been selling as well as the other jewelry. When women buy rings now, they prefer the double-axe or the woman's symbol. But some unexplainable voice coaxed me to bring this set. Which one do you like best?" The

middle-aged woman walks her fingers across the rings in front of me adding more magic to their already magical appearance.

"It's true. A lot of women wear rings with symbols of power. But I've been looking for a butterfly ring for ages. Delicate things make me feel strong. What I mean is, there is strength in knowing one's fragility. And after all, we're only as strong as the sum of all of our parts."

As I speak, a certain green-colored stone shaped into a butterfly attracts me. "This is the one I want!" I light upon the ring almost hungrily.

As she wraps it up, she tells me her name—Margaret. She has joined a tribe of thirty people, all of whom make jewelry and travel around the country selling their wares. They usually stay at motels and work a radius of fifty miles, before moving on to the next place. That night they would stay near Bennington.

She has heard from some of the students there that I would be playing on the marimba tonight—the same intrument she used to play when she was a youngster. So she has come with her rings. "I used to be married to a famous novelist," she confides to me. Her kind face is framed by luxurious silver hair. "We lived in the suburbs and I had six kids. Then one day when I was in my 40 s I packed up and left him, and that life ended. I took the three youngest kids with me and have not returned. Sometimes my older children come to stay with me, too. Now I am me—I am doing finally what feels right."

I hug her warmly then, even though I am momentarily caught by an unexplainable shyness as she says, "There is something so deeply felt about your music, Bird, and about the way you sing it. So touching and so natural. I would like to give you this ring."

"If you would like, we could make a trade. I'll give you a record of my music and you can give me the ring. I would feel good about that."

After we exchange our wares, I feel a sense of relief. I don't have to be jealous of Mari; I have my work too and my admirers.

Later that night it rains fiercely. The mass murders are beginning in Guyana. The murders of Harvey Milk and Mayor Masconi

are being fantasized in the mind of a sick man. It is a heavy night.

It is the kind of night someone you have loved for six years tells you she is not in love with you any more and another friend tells you she cannot be close to you because you live in the city and she lives in the country. It is the kind of night that lovers and friends end their relationships and strangers declare new love.

On a night like this it takes more than candles and wine to lift my spirits. It takes the presence of Margaret with her unexpected gift. What a strange day and night it is, as mysterious and fragile as dreams, as roses, as butterflies.

* * *

22 de Diciembre

Dearest Judith,

I find your letter after to be in jail for identification. I still have a little cell inside me.

I didn't receive the letters you say send me and because the political situation here many letters was and will be lost. What did you told me there for example about Joan of Arc? I feel so difficult to write letters tonight, but I want so much to be connected with you and so I try. But this seems so tight.

Today I'm afraid more than others, for me, for friends and people and children will grow through all this terrible time here and all over latinoamerica. I feel you are keeping and blessing me, love, along all the terror. Did I tell you what happen to a dear friend of mine? I saw her on a Friday night and we make up to meet again on the following Sunday. We were starting to make the music together, playing the earthy folk song of the farmworker people, much of it from Indian heritage. When I went to her house not far from me, there was no one there, no sign of her and there was like the daily things all around, the dishes on the table. None of her friends know where she is either and I am so worried for her.

I went to the dentist last year. I have a new tooth. I eat very few meat also and sugar. I don't smoke. I know the sea will be death in only 40 years more if we don't stop the blind capitalism

system all over the world.

Judith, mi mariposita, mi gringa Gelsomina, would you want to go through all this heavy language and then to let me touch your soul there? Though in many ways we are living a different reality, in other ways is the same.

Did you remember when we walked embracing to each other through 14th Street? And some time your short hair, curly and lovely hair from the nape of neck, touched my face, caress my face. And some time was my long hair who spoke to your ear, to the lobe of your ear, to the architecture of your ear where my tongue was swimming and making languages only the sacred bodies sanctify by love can understand. Oh Judith, when I try to write you is like if I would be dreaming and images close my eyes and open another eyes with them in a particular space and time.

I ask me how did you felt when we lived together, because I never could remake that kind of physical and spiritual emotion when to be with you became the more important intense dreadful event of universe manifest inside me.

Oh how I could lost that? How we can be living in different lives with different people if el amor es la unica patria I think sometime.

This morning I feel we never will touch and see again. Then I feel I can't support this feeling inside me and I try to change it.

Last time I went to my parents' house, I found a so diminute young tree they plant in the garden. I spoke a lot with it. I found it strange and lovely and I named it spirit of Judith growing in my land. So when I wanted to cry or to laugh, I ran towards the tree and shouted, "Spirit of Judith, Spirit of Judith," many times until to find a certain calm inside of me.

I would like to make for you a drawing of the black nocturnal butterflies flying here, sleeping so quiet during the day. Te amo mi patito feo. Don't leave me alone without your letters.

Mari

—I don't know how long I will stay here, but this is the time for me to be here. Most of the people I know is outside of the

country or outside of life or projecting to go out. For me is necessary to be here, because I'm finding the old-new contents from the deep America.

* * *

"I'm glad we can still to talk to each other," she says.

We sit in a booth at the Gold Penny Restaurant near my studio where you can get two eggs, home fries, toast and juice for fifty-nine cents. Her two-month visa is running out.

She spoons sugar into her coffee and heaps jam on her toast. What she does to her body is her own business now; I am not her surrogate mother.

"I like the way you teach," she says. "You're not like a lot of the feminists here, Judith." Her tone is surprisingly tender.

The night before she has read to a continuing education class I teach called Women and Language. She shared poems and experiences. She has made it clear to me that she cannot speak openly of her political situation for fear of severe repercussions upon her return. Officials would question her; her activities here were being monitored.

Mari told us how, despite the repression of women's creativity in South America, luminescent and surrealistic imagery can spring forth when women wrestle with the macho, patriarchal forces. She herself is an example of her beliefs. As poetry flowed from her wide, sensual mouth in Spanish, she expanded. And her enthusiasm with words opened my students like water opens pine coffins.

"The coffee in this restaurant is so delicioso, isn't it, Mari?" How good to share a creative situation again after many days of flatness between us. After all, I am her old friend star even if I am not one of the super stars she has become so intrigued with of late.

"You keep close to the grass roots and the working class, don't you? You live like so poor person," Mari says after a reflective moment.

"Yes, I do," I say, "and I'm glad we can still talk to each other, too."

In the mirror beside our table I see her smiling at me. I take a

sip of hot coffee. How would she treat me now if I were a media star, I wonder. She lights up a cigarette and sucks in deeply. I can't forget how the week before she pressed autumn leaves into a book by one well-to-do woman.

"I'm a culture worker," I say. My voice is harsher than I want it to be. My fingers move over the buttons on my shirt. They're all there. "I told you about my family, Mari. They're staunchly middle-class. But I feel myself to be something else. Not middle class. And not working class either."

I won't tell her that I long to lie on a beach in the Bahamas and luxuriate at a hotel with a long porch overlooking the ocean, and have people bring me delicious hor d'heurves. I'm sure she basks in glittering fantasies over cappucino uptown at the Laissez-Faire Restaurant.

She smiles but I concentrate on the salt shaker. There's no rice in it to keep the salt dry. The truth is once she was enamored of me and now she isn't, so big deal. She's inconstant. So is the moon.

Mari's eyes look like marbles. Does she really see me? I say, "I just don't want to be labeled, put in a box and separated from other people. Know what I mean?"

"Judith, I didn't label you; I defined you. I say you keep close to the working class, that's all. Is something bothering you? You seem so silent. Make a bridge for me so I can know what you think."

She's the one who's supposed to be building bridges between feminists! She ought to have been a bridge painter. Then she could always be with her bridges. They make a good wage. How can she act so calm? I feel like punching the wall.

"These eggs aren't bad. How's yours? Want some catsup?" I ask.

"I already have. Come on, Judith. Talk to me."

"I know you know what I mean. It's not that big a deal. But people forget—like you, Mari, you forgot to keep being in love with me. I'm sorry to bring that up again. What I mean is—well, it's like the difference for me between writing and playing music. With writing I have to have the exact word that illuminates my

thought. But with music I want the words to fly away, just get away from me, so I can get in touch with sounds again. Sounds and emotions. Know what I mean?"

"Wait a minute, Judith. You seem like insecto de agua, darting here and there. Make logical."

"I'm just saying I need to name and unname. Focus in—focus out. An energy starts up in this back and forth tension."

"That's the Hegelian dialectics. I know."

An angry voice breaks into our conversation. "No, Maria! Fill the creamers with this." A large mustached man behind the crowded counter is speaking. I stare at him. But he won't be put off and continues to rant at the waitress next to him.

Mari nods me to ignore them and I continue. "Words have their time, just like we do. The ones I use today might be outdated tomorrow. I don't want people to be suffocated by words. Like labels when they compress people into one dimensional objects. It's disgusting to do that to someone."

"Hokay, beautiful Judith. I follow exactly what you say. But also, I can hear hurt and anger in your voice. Come on, tell me. What's bothering you."

"Nothing. I'm just trying to tell you something, that's all. Still if a point has to be made quickly, labels can..."

"God damn it, woman! Do as I tell you." The angry man behind the counter is pointing at a small silver pitcher in front of him.

"But customers think there is milk or cream in their pitchers, not chemicals," the waitress says, in a surprisingly loud voice. "And personally I think it's a deceit not to inform them." She looks directly at us as if for support. I see she wears heavy make-up. Her hair is shiny black. Is she Puerto Rican or Italian? I'm not great at telling nationalities right off.

"Look, Judith." Mari shrugs at the man. She thrusts her middle finger into the air. "How's that for making a point quickly?" We both giggle like school girls.

And suddenly the tension and tears are gone from inside me. The harshness is gone from my voice too, as I continue. "There are definitely times when I want to call myself a lesbian and

times I just don't. I want to be seen as a whole person, not only as someone who goes to bed with women. People's minds light up lasciviously at the very word 'lesbian.' It's actually a beautiful word, you know, but it's so damn loaded."

"Here's where our political realities are so different from each other." Mari directs her eyes momentarily to the feisty waitress. "It's interesting how you can to choose whether to use the word lesbian or not. Remembers, in my country, I can't say that word at all publicly. That's courting the police for sure. So I don't talk openly about my sexuality because it just don't make the most important necessity of our struggle now."

"I can't comprehend what it would be like not to be able to talk about my sexuality—at least with someone. At the college where I teach in the evenings it's okay to be reasonably open, and I do have a community of people I can talk to."

"I can talk about my sexuality with my close compañera but homosexuality is considered by the majority of the people in my country to be sicky. Like the monsters. It would be disaster for me to go around carrying a flag saying I was a lesbian."

"I have visions of all homosexuals being forced to wear arm bands and gradually being carted off to camps. It's very, very scary."

"So, you know what I talk about, Judith."

"I know, Mari." But do I know? The kinds of suffering I have gone through over this word are not even within the parameters of her struggle. How ridiculous I have been to see her as consciously out to hurt me. My god, she's trying to survive, that's all. I'm glad gutsy people like that woman behind the counter exist. I'm glad Mari....

"Are you okay, Judith? You look so far away."

"I was just thinking about gutsy people. Mari, do you think I'm courageous? Here, I struggle from day to day about whether to tell anyone I'm a lesbian or not, while your struggle centers aound basic human rights. But still it's true that to be lesbian here takes some kind of fantastic courage, the courage to 'not mate in captivity'—to quote Gloria Steinem. But more than that, the courage to actually bond with other women when it's so

threatening to men. But it sure ain't easy."

"What is easy to make that's true?" Mari says. "If we're going to keep talking let me get a second coffee. Maybe you want, too. It makes me so happy to be talking like this with you again."

"Me too. Okay, I'll have a second cup, but no poison stuff for me."

"Which, the non-dairy creamer or the sugar?"

"Both."

Mari looks good. She sparkles when she enjoys a conversation. There really is a whole world we can share in thinking together—just appreciate our differences. It feels better to let her in. I'm just not going to worry about....

"Here, Judith. I brought you some real cream. Si? Go on now, but go slowly. You know, I move with the turtles."

"I know, but sure and steady is a winning combination, my friend." I hesitate. "I don't know much about what you've been going through the last few years." Could she tell me what I'm afraid to hear?

"Maybe when you are ready to know those things you will ask me. I survived."

She has seen through me. People ask questions when they're ready to ask them. She says, "Don't feel guilty for me. Because it is not like a true emotion."

"I'm not feeling guilty for you. I just want to know what happened to you."

"Well, I still think you have some aspect in you like to idolize me because I'm third world. Something like that."

No, Mari, I say to myself, I don't idolize you right now. I just want to know—did they put you in prison? Did they torture you ? I know about the electric goad, the grill, the dancing lady that they use on the vagina, the nipples. Oh, Mari, I'm not ready to know what happened to you. I'm still too full of my own hurt to be able to take in yours. Give me some more time. I will know when it's right to ask you. I say, "That was a crazy fight we had last weekend in that country store. It was so...."

"It seem funny to me now," she laughs.

"I really thought you knew that Tampax actually have asbes-

tos in them. And large tampons can collect harmful bacteria if they aren't changed regularly."

"I know that, Judith, but weren't you being the sarcastic with me when you say you were going to use rags again instead of the little plugs? I keep calling them Texacos."

Just then a tired looking waiter arrives at our table and begins to clear the dishes. He wipes the crumbs off sloppily, spilling several into our laps. Probably he is not paid enough to care.

"Tampax," I whisper as he moves on. "Isn't it an ugly name? But then, the name of what you use isn't any better. Kotex. God, what is the meaning of all these X words in trade names these days. Kleenex, Xerox, Exxon."

"I don't believe you really are going to use rags again like the poor women in Argentina use? Or a leetle sponge? I think you were joking me."

"I wasn't kidding. A lot of my friends are off of Tampax."

"Wait, Judith. I'll be right back." She has fled to the counter and is talking animatedly in Spanish with the waitress. So she must be puertorricueña, not Italian.

Maybe Mari doesn't want to talk about this. When she comes back to the table she says, "She say she thought I was French. Here. Share this hot chocolate with me. It's so funny how the peoples, even the Spanish people here, think I'm European." She sips the hot liquid.

"Well, you are partly."

"She added more sugar for me. I know it's disgusting. When all my tooth fall out you will say I told you so."

"I guess really it's your business, Mari."

"You're right. I was upset about the way Carol was ignoring me. That's how come there was that tension between us in the store. Just because she like you. Didn't make sisterly sense to me."

"She's wanted to be close to me for a long time and I always show up at her place with another girlfriend. I told her that I thought she was rude to you and she acted like she didn't even realize it. She said she'd write a note to you, because she really likes you."

"Don't make no difference to me, Judith."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Well, it does make me feel a stranger here. When the women are thoughtless to me I feel it's because they can never see me. And they can't see me without experiencing my reality."

"That's why I got so mad at you. You weren't hearing me. I don't buy all those luxuries and you know that."

"You still have the fierceness in you. You women are so intellectually concerned with being nice to the third world women here, but you don't know our day-to-day reality."

I reach for her cup of hot chocolate, feeling clumsy. Will she slap my hand? "What can I do, Mari? I'm stuck with myself."

"Don't avoid what I'm saying. You yelled like that in front of other people. And what you say? 'I'll underdevelop you if you don't listen to me.' I don't believe that you did that."

"I'm sorry. I tried to apologize to you in the car. But you can be so damned stubborn. I guess we still have to build a bridge between us."

"In my country it's very different than here."

How many times has she said this to me?

"Survival to us means to be able to live. Maybe someday you'll understand; not now."

"Damn, it, Mari. Don't patronize me."

"You peoples, all trying so hard to be 'upwardly mobile.' It's so ridiculous expression."

"Well, I'm not upwardly mobile. You say so yourself. And I'm not downwardly mobile either. I'm outwardly mobile. I'm trying to be aware of more and more."

"All this about survival. It's Madison Avenue campaign to make people feel they need to buy and buy. I walk down the street in your cities and the stuff you people throw away would be like the greatest gifts for my people."

"You know, Mari, you never used to harangue like this. I like it better when you talk to me about your Parana River and your tortugas. I'm getting tired of feeling like a digit to you. I don't want to always be lumped together with your terrible North Americanos Business Mens."

"I'm sorry, Judith, but there are people who honor the people and people who honor the money. The puertorricueño man over there behind the counter wants to make money by using the poison creamers. And he is not rich. But once you have a lot of monies you have to do so much to protects that monies like murder. Or if people are keeping the money from you, maybe you have to murder them."

I respond, "Only money is talking these days, and everybody is labeling everybody else."

"Be like me, my pretty one. I have walk between labels all my life: one leg in the poor people's flower patch and the other in the rich, educated people's gardens. In Argentina, the college-educated peoples generally become the bourgeois managers who want to control the workers and keep their positions. But I would like to help manage or better word, build a positive cultural, political atmosphere for the women in my country."

Always she is building, building. A wave of exhaustion comes over me. Can I stay listening to her? She's so intense. Also, she's on a coffee jag.

The place is thinning out a bit. Maybe we should go to my place. I'd love to lie down. I could listen to her better then. Maybe I could put my head in her lap. It would seem like listening to a story. It makes me tense to keep conversation up too long. That's why I need music. I really get restless with words.

We're two giant heads without bodies, bobbing and nodding animatedly. It's because we don't make love any more. Also, she smokes too much. She does everything too much. Talks too much, too much sweets. But she really enjoys talking, more than I do. I like sounds; I like to make sounds. Maybe I just don't like to think. I belong with people who only grunt and cry. People who make crude marks in the ground. Marks are letters. Letters are words.

I remember those birds cawing that time in the woods. How I felt their cries in my head like marks. I saw their cries like a kind of hieroglyphs. Oh, Mari, Mari, I can't believe we will never make love again.

She says, "I wasn't smoking at all in my country. Just the last

weeks here. I guess I'm nervous. There's so much to do. I feel such a responsibility." She must have heard my thoughts. She's psychic.

"Mari, you know the only time I smoke is when you and I are talking politics. But not when we're talking about poetry."

"It's the true. The True Blue." She offers me a cigarette. I decline. "You seem to feel especially uncomfortable to me talking about the politics, but for me it's naturally. You tease me so much about my English, but notice I have never teased you about your stiffness with the political discussion."

"Probably it's because my mother used to talk nonstop at the dining room table."

"Don't blame it on your mother. It's not necessarily a bad thing. Could be for good reasons. Like the political construct does not interest you so much as the creative one. It's okay to speak the poetry to me. No matter what we are talking about, it feels good. But you made me think something. Let's not spend all of our last times together in coffeeshops. Let's go to some art show next week. And I have a so important film for you to see about Chile."

Her smoke makes my eyes water. Will she think I'm crying? I say, "That sounds great. I haven't seen any shows for a long time."

She finishes the last of her hot chocolate. Then in a mutual motion, we rise, pay the bill and leave the Gold Penny, entering the bustle of traffic on Fifth Avene.

* * *

"What do you think that painting's supposed to show, Mari?"

"It seem a replication of an Indian pictograph—like from a rock painting."

"It could either be one person or Siamese twins joined at the backbone—or two women lovers resting back to back."

"I think the artist wanted it to be all those. See how there's slight differences in the two halves—one person is a little darker than the other, like the shadow of the other."

"And a little heavier. Let's see, where's the title? There it is in calligraphy on the wall. The women who put the show together

really did a job. It's so wonderfully full of life."

"Read to me, Judith?"

"*Chövíohóya—The Power of Twins: We Are All Part of One Another.* That's the Hopi word for both twins and a young deer. Ever notice how feminists seem to need to explain everything."

Mari gives me a wet kiss on my cheek. "So it's supposed to evoke twinness of all of us. See, you can't to keep yourself isolate for that anymore."

"They must be sororal twins but definitely not identical, fraternal or dizygotic."

"I forget sometime you are twin. You never talk about Meredith except in your sleep. I never heard sororal or dizygotic, Judith. Did you make that up?"

"I made up sororal to describe sister twins; we're definitely not fraternal and we're not identical. And dizygotic means a male and female combo. I don't know why, Mari, but I feel like Meredith and I are somewhere between twins and sisters. There's this funny feeling I have that mother kept reinforcing that we were twins—twin brushes and combs, twin purses, twin clothes ad infinitum nauseum—because she was afraid that maybe we weren't twins. We seem more like sisters. It's like parents try to train their boy kids to be tough and their girl kids to be soft, instead of letting the kids be themselves. I mean if mother knew we were twins why did she have to keep asserting our twinship to us and to others? Someday I just know I'm going to find out that we were actually conceived at different times, but we were forced to enter the world at the same time so Mom wouldn't have to make two trips to the hospital."

"So why would you think that?"

"Because I was born a few weeks premature—maybe I really shouldn't have come out on the same day as my sister. They say we were born ten minutes apart, but I was pulled out. I didn't come out willingly."

"I don't know about you, Judith. Seem you always like being between the raindrops. Like in a place you make. So maybe you're right."

"Meredith's and my temperments are so different and our

body parts seem all very unalike."

"Come on, Not-Twin. I want to look at her over there." Mari points to a huge wood carving some distance away: a nude female figure crouches in what looks to be a birthing process; an organic shape is coming out of her vagina. The commanding figure is well-muscled, proud and dignified. Before I can get Mari to look at a case of carved, wooden cups nearby—they look like breasts—she has fled to the big mama figure and is doing a slow-motion sidestep around her.

"Hey, Sweetheart, don't get too excited. This is an art gallery."

"She is so androgynous presence," Mari says, continuing her homage in dance.

"But what she's doing is uniquely female. I wonder why the artist didn't show more human features in the object coming out of her?"

Mari stops to examine the protruding shape. "Maybe to suggest more a creation myth image? Woman as creator of life forms? It is possible."

"Look what the title is: *She Who Amazes!*"

"She who amazes is so Amazonian. She take away my breath, like my Pachamama."

"Now who was Pachamama again?"

"Deity of all agriculture. Is really Pachamma."

"Maybe she's giving birth to a cabbage."

"You're so funny, my Pachamama."

As we continue to make our way around a series of large, organic shaped pots that look both useful and aesthetic, Mari has to stroke each one of them.

"I'm so glad there are no minimalists here," I say. "Remember the show we saw two days ago?"

"You mean that display of sewer pipes and giant beebees? Seem like so luxury to spend all that monies on seeing things you can see everyday and in useful machines."

"That was one person's idea of making us more aware of our reality, I guess, but in a minimalist way. I personally like maximalism like these gorgeous pots."

"I know what you means." She now points to an earthen pot that looks like bag pipes or some kind of blowing instrument. I expect her to start up another respect overture but she stays still. In every tube the artist has placed brilliant colored straw flowers. The patina of the pot reminds me of the subtle earth colors of the Eucalyptus bark.

Now Mari has gone on to examine a wall hanging whose natural tan fibers complement the pots. I notice there are no "NO TOUCHING" signs around. She is taking full advantage of this fact. She seems to be counting the tassels woven in the bottom of the hanging.

"What's the magic number?"

"Look! Seem like our quipu."

"Our key who?"

"Quipu. Quipu. See the knots tied at different points in the cords. And each cord is a different color and size. And look, even of different textures. She must be South Americano artist. Here's the name—Sandra Ruby. Don't sound latino."

"What's a quipu?"

"It's like a so primitive mnemonic device and each different knot, and where its placed and how its made and all the different cords with the different thinness all are the reminders of the facts and events in our oral stories."

"You mean they're like notes a speaker might make before giving a speech?"

"Yes, something like that."

"Can you 'read' what Sandra has written?"

Mari closes her eyes and fingers each strand carefully. I am impressed.

"What is it, Mari? Tell me."

She shakes her head not wanting to be interrupted. It seems like minutes go by. At last she opens her eyes and looks at me seriously. She says, "You are about to meet a fascinating and awesome woman who can tell you secrets only she know about this place."

"But how did you do it, Mari? That's incredible. Show me how to...."

"You *are* about to meet a fascinating and awesome lesbian." A beautiful contralto voice from behind us makes us both turn sharply. "Do you like it?"

A black woman with tight silver curls which mix attractively with ink black ones smiles at us broadly. She's older than Mari or me. "I call it *Dignity*. And see, the story images are woven in the body of the hanging. Those cords are to make a soft frame for the hanging."

I look at Mari bemused; I really believed she was 'reading' them.

"It was my personal story," Mari grins impishly. "But came true already. She is here." Mari puts her arm affectionately around the waist of the woman.

"I'm Sandy Ruby. Pleased to meetcha. What are your names?"

Mari introduces us.

"I've been watching you both have fun with the exhibit. It's nice to see that."

"Oh, I love the show. Everything makes me feel like to jump-rope for happening," Mari says.

"I'm so glad. You should have seen it before *Add In*. We be working night and day on this."

"Addin?" I say.

"The Add—as in math—In," she repeats.

"What's that?" Mari says.

"Last spring, lesbians in the community decided to organize . show in this gallery. The problem being they didn't go out to all the women. They had a clique thing going—the so-called establishment artists, the New York Times Review artists. So work like mine, which didn't fall into your fine arts' categories—painting, sculpture—was left out. There were only a few pieces by third world women. You know, our works of art can be good to look at and helpful around the house, too. Why not? Pots can look like sculptures but hold things and rugs can be dramas. I hung my rug up but its still a rug. My kid just naturally does things like that when he makes things. My son, Tony, really opened my eyes up again to being playful. He makes sculptures that are

musical instruments."

"Oh, you have a son, that's nice. Is he here with you?" I ask.

"He was for awhile, but he took off with his pals to play the video games somewhere in the Village. He's at that restless age, you know, when the hormones are poppin'."

"Lucky you. A teenager," I say, patting her shoulder. "My brother has two young teenage kids and they are a trip. I really identify with their rebelliousness."

"Actually, Tony is mature for his age, if you can call doing break dancing and playing the videos mature. He's only twelve. But he looks older. He's one of those whizz kid types. A gifted child. He always has to be doing something. Takes after his dad, at least his dad when I knew him. The guy just took off and left us; I'm a single parent if you can't tell. But that's another story I'd just as soon not tell."

Mari and I have been nodding non stop while Sandy talks, as if in rhythm to her speech. It almost sounds as if she chants while she speaks—it's so restful to hear.

"What do the pictures mean in your wall hanging, I mean, your rug?" I ask.

She points to the first image at the top of the rug. There is a triangle of black wool followed by a group of black women. The next image shows a woman lifting a basket followed by an image of a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine. Then a woven design of a black bear is followed by a row of black women's heads in profile.

"Can you guess what it says? It's from a poem I love by Barbara Noel Scott called *African Women Walking.* Come on,try to 'read' it."

Mari starts..."Black women lift"...she pauses.

"Let's see," I say. "Black women lift bread and wine."

Sandy mimes the charade gesture meaning *extend.*

"A staff of life," I add. She waves me on.

"Necessity," I say.

"Yes" she says, "necessity."

Mari repeats: "Black women lift necessity...."

"And bear it on their head," I say. I've heard the quote before.

"You got it," Sandy says. "Now say it all. *Black women lift necessity and bear it on their heads.*"

"That say for me so much like a definition of working class of all third world peoples," Mari says.

"Me too," Sandy says.

I ask, "So how did the show get to be so together? You say there was an *Add In*?"

Sandy is eager to talk. "It seemed like once again third world women had to teach these organizers. We had to show them how to make a good show with quality and variety. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt and say their exclusionist policy was unconscious rather than intentional—but at some point you have to take complete responsibility for your actions. So we told them to open the damn show up. In the midst of our dialogue a group of so-called militants, middle class white women, came over to us and said they were going to close the show because it had excluded third world women. We say, 'Hey, Mamas, take a look at us. Ain't we third world women? You're now surrounded by Chicano, Hispanic, Latina, Korean, Native American Indian and we are actively participating in this event from now on. Why don't you ask us what we want instead of telling us? Help us get our works of art hung up or set down and let's get this show on the road!' It took a while for them to see that we were into transforming the situation, not using it to make a revolution for ourselves."

"The politics can get so murky," Mari says. "It's the incredible." She has kept her head cocked, listening so carefully to Sandy's story.

"So where are you all from?" Sandy seems to relax and really look at us for the first time.

Before I can comment Mari says, "The land of the Pampas."

Sandy looks puzzled.

"Argentina," I say.

She laughs. "Oh, I thought you were saying, *pampers.*" But you're so white!"

Mari seems to blush. "There are a lot of white-skinned Europeans that look like so good white middle class in Argentina.

But my family is poor immigrant Italian farm workers and I have Jewish and Indian blood in me too."

"Oh snap. You're a real mix." Sandy's interest perks up.

"It's the same in our culture," Mari offers. "The Indians have kept the beautiful marriage of meaning and design while the European influence, the intellectual, the more middle-class artists, push for the elitism of the fine arts. I know exactly what you mean."

"Ah, so you aren't middle class," Sandy says, as if that fact allows Mari's whiteness. She seems to notice my discomfort with the bent of the conversation. After all, I am white and I come from the middle class; can she tell just by looking at me? "Oh, well," she says, "you can't tell a peach by it's skin or something to that effect," nodding to me warmly. "But you can tell a lot," she adds winking at Mari.

"It's a so complex situation," Mari affirms to both of us.

"Look, if we're going to talk more I feel like a smoke. We've got a separate room for that. Would you two join me if the smoke doesn't bother you?"

"Judith's trying to help me cut down; but I'm still smoking, so I'll join you." Mari is in her element. She loves to smoke and talk politics.

"Sure," I say. "I'll inhale your smoke."

They both look at me to see if I'm being sarcastic or good natured. I assure my good humour with a smile. Sandy leads us to a small separate room in the back with comfortable sofas and a coffee machine. We pour ourselves some coffee and then rest back into the largest sofa.

"It's important to understand that middle class doesn't mean same thing for me as for you here," Mari says.

"Hmm, that's interesting," Sandy says. She takes two cigarettes out of a pack in her blouse pocket and gives one to Mari. They both light up from her match.

"I only begin to understand what middle class and worker class mean in 1946 with the Peronist Movement." Smoke pours out of Mari's nostrils.

"Let's see. You were two years old then, Mari," I say reaching

over to stroke her arm.

Her stern look silences me.

"I meant to say my studies of the 1946 Peronist Movement," she says.

"Yah, I've heard of him," Sandy says. "Didn't he improve the economy by selling meat and grains to Europe and that improved industrialization—something like that. I studied political science in college, twenty-five years ago. I'm not too sharp on all that stuff right now. I know more about community politics and tenants' rights and sex education than about world history, unfortunately." She is careful to blow her smoke away from me.

"That's right. Peoples from all the provinces, poor, peasants, Indians all begin to do factory work," Mari continues enthusiastically. "Cities grew along with a strong urban working class movement. For a while it seem that the working class peoples and the middle class capitalist oriented peoples could to coexist. But it had a weak base. Generally the people wanted to keep their jobs and their homes and not to make the political overtures."

"I can sure relate to that. All of us are afraid to stand up sometimes to risk our jobs and homes. But like here, for my people, we have to stand up to get our jobs and homes!" Sandy says.

"That's a so true reality," Mari says. "After World War II the International Market was run by a Populist group and it came to an end. And this is when your terrible monster country came in. The multinational corporations supported by the United States took over these businesses."

"Oh yes, good old Standard Oil, Texaco, Exxon," Sandy says.

"So Peron wasn't helping the people anymore. His government never had been a conscientious worker political movement. The army came in and put a noose around the working class."

"So did the middle class support the American monopolies over there?" I ask.

"Well, like I say. When you say middle class in Argentina it's

not same as here. The people that work office jobs, techicians with some education and owning some goods were called the *little middle class.*"

"I see what you're driving at," Sandy says. "You've got different kinds of middle classes. Well, we do too. We've got a white middle class and a black middle class and believe me, honey, the privileges are entirely different."

"Right. That's another whole reality," I say.

Mari nods.

"Our *little middle class* have always been more politically aware and active than here," Mari says. "But today it's almost disappeared. The economy is much more black and white."

"You mean polarized, honey," Sandy interrupts.

Mari's momentum doesn't flounder. "Yes, I mean there are the so poor people and the so monied people. The more richer grow the middle class, the more larger the *villas miserias* grow on outskirts of Buenos Aires. You would like to die if you saw these places."

"The villas misery?" Sandy asks.

"You call the shanty towns," Mari says.

"That's like here, Mari. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer," I say. I sound like a cliche.

"So true," Sandy says.

"Someday all the dreams of our working class and little middle class peoples could to become a revolutionary force."

"Right on," Sandy says. "But tell me about you. Are you from the working class, or the little middle class? I love that expression. What was it like for you personally?"

"I grew up during the Peronist period of the little middle class when there was a left radical movement and a large base populist movement. And I was a so lucky person. I got a scholarship sponsor by Peron government to study at the Universidad."

"What did you study?"

"Philosophy."

"Ah, that explains it," Sandy says.

"What?" I ask.

"She has a distant air about her, removed."

Mari looks disturbed.

"Oh, I didn't mean that as a criticism, just an observation. In fact, what I really mean is you're reflective, analytical. I like it." She places a hand on Mari's shoulder. Whatever passes between them encourages Mari to continue.

"My family was the little middle class by then," Mari emphasizes with a gesture of hands showing a small amount. "But at twenty-one I became part of the radical movement, a class of its own. We work to help organize a stronger union with the workers. Unfortunately, this base was being taken over by the Peronist bureaucracy. And then the military also began to handcuff our vision of workers' solidarity. Gradually he was forced out of Argentina in 1955 by the Army."

"So you're a wild-eyed radical too," Sandy says.

"I am a so crazy radical. Sometime it become so...." Mari stops short as if something has caught in her throat.

"What's wrong, Mari?" She is breathing quickly as if not getting enough oxygen.

"You should stop smoking," Sandy says.

"It's not that. I can't to talk."

"Mari can't talk openly, Sandy, about her political situation at home." I probably shouldn't tell her that Mari is on a strict two-month visa. And that her movements are most likely being monitored. "She's on an academic visa to give lectures on poetry"

"We should get some air. We could go to my house to talk," Sandy says.

"It doesn't matter if she's in a house or an art gallery. She is on self-imposed secrecy as well as politically advised silence."

"Was someone in your family killed, Mari?" Sandy reaches over to Mari to comfort her. I wish she would get the hint to not pressure her.

"No—no—it's not that making an oppression in my heart." Mari's breathing is still off.

"Mari, what can we do to help you now? Should I get you some water?" I should get a taxi and take her home.

"It's that so terrible scholarship and my degree in the Philosophy," Mari blurts out.

"But that's so wonderful that you achieved that," Sandy says.

"It's not so wonderful how I've been protected and my compañeras have not."

"Oh, Mari, I didn't know," Sandy says.

"No, I can't talk about it," Mari says.

When, Mari? When were your compañeras tortured I want to ask her. What about you, Mari? When you were in prison two years ago?

"Yes, Judith, you already know," Mari says, looking so deeply into me that I feel nothing could be hidden from her. "You can't ask me what you have needed to ask me because I can't say to you that yes I was tortured. I was not because my identification save me. They begin to separate the degreed people for their own protection from newspaper reportage because Amnesty International was on the trail of the military. They got so many of the young politically aware people. My cell mate was grabbed. I never saw her again. Don't ask me to say anything more. I can't say any more than that." Her body is jerking uncontrollably.

Sandy and I enclose her in our arms.

"Mari, Mari, it's not your fault,' I say. "You are a brave, brave woman. I love you."

"Two months later I heard that she was tortured and murdered. She was true revolutionary worker. Not like me, imposter. And another of my friends, a musician friend with whom I was beginning to play the political folk songs with. She disappear just like that one day. I went to her house and was as if they just grab her while she work to make the dinner. A few months later they find her body in the river floating with the bruises and cuts all over her. Why couldn't to have been me just as her?" Mari is stone-faced, unapproachable.

"But, Mari, you can't feel guilty for what they did. You can feel anger, hate and terror and fear. But you can't feel guilty that it wasn't you. Look what you're going through all the time. Oh, God. I wish you didn't have to live there, Mari. Mari is the most beautiful poet in the world, Sandy. She is telling the world what is happening there." I can't stop the sobs which rise up in me.

Sandy tries to comfort first Mari and then me. The three of us move closer to each other on the sofa as if for protection.

Mari won't, can't talk any more. We sit in silence, our arms about each other's shoulders.

When at last she gives a deep sigh and seems to relax into herself again, Sandy asks her about her family, probably to get her mind off the more troubling subjects.

Mari's voice is soft, deliberate.

"My family is from poor tenant farm people. Even during populist movement they owned no property but they could rent. They get some education too and jobs. My father had some horses he love and could save a little money. They became then little middle class. But now I'm trying to sew together my two worlds, the illiterate poor and the college educated. It makes me feel sometimes like crazy. And so hypocrite."

"You're just a living example of that guy Hegel's dialectics, Mari." Sandy says. "We all have to live with our contradictions. It's just part of life."

"You people are so good listeners," Mari says. Her eyes shine with tears. "You know, the military has been a constant fact in our political life. The rich people seem to create institutions it then need to controls with the army and that's what's happening right now in my country." She looks exhausted to me.

Sandy closes her eyes as if to shut out some of the unbearable reality Mari has shared with us. I close mine as well.

"Mari, my sister," Sandy says. "I think we both have to keep the faith. Believe that the visions of the third world women can work to stop the torture by our oppressors."

"Exactemente." Mari nods.

For the first time in the conversation Sandy looks at me. "What do you think, Judith? You are a beautiful friend for Mari. I can see you have similiar souls."

"I think we all have to be reborn again and again like new in order to be able to see clearly," I say.

The pressure of their hands grasping mine feels good.

MARIPOSA

On a fall afternoon, just a week later, we sit in the Figaro coffeehouse on the corner of McDougal and Bleecker Street, haunted by evasive earth smells. Mari sports a handmade, red corduroy jacket and bright yellow leather boots, gifts from her mother. Time and the proximity of their homes have brought them closer.

I still feel something special will happen to join us. After all, I have spent so many years loving her. I order lemonade and Mari orders a cappucino. I am trying to give up coffee as though the renunciation of the black drug could temper my feelings for her.

Coffee-making was the only activity I watched my parents truly enjoy together. Every morning they would rise early and brew their coffee to the sound of the mourning dove. Then, like two excited birds, they would gossip and sip before going about their tasks. What they have exchanged every morning for 60 years is their business. I never quite understood their riffs, but each time I drink a cup of coffee, I think of them and smile bemusedly at the mystery of my existence. Somewhere in my psyche I really believe I was born out of a pot of their mud-colored brew. I never told Mari that coffee always brings them back to me.

"You know, Mari, when we sit at a table like this, catty-cornered, it seems natural to reach out and touch each other."

"I didn't tell you not to touch me, Judith. I just say that I want to be your dearest friend now, not your lover."

"How can you be even my 'dearest friend' from the other side

of the world?" I snap. My body had foolishly started to reach out to her again.

"I say you can touch me," she says.

She confuses me. "Don't play with me, kid. You know what I mean. Touch. Caress. Lie down with. Hold. Make love with. Touch deeply."

"No, I don't feel that. I don't want that," she replies.

Maybe if we were in the country I'd have a chance with her. Maybe I have a problem with boundaries between friendship and lovership. I seem to feel that once a lover always a lover. I should probably take this up with a therapist. But definitely Mother Nature could help me straighten out these confusions. I actually cheer up at this thought and begin tapping on the table top. When the strange phrase pops into my head, *The Last Resort Motel*, I snap out of my revery.

I suddenly remember our destination for the afternoon. "Hey, Mari. The documentary on Chile begins in fifteen minutes. Did you say it lasts four hours? What if I can't sit through it?"

"Judith, I really want you to see this film. You'll know my reality better. I really want you to see her with me."

"I understand, Mari, but I hardly ever go to the movies any more. They make me nauseous. Something about the deodorant they use to clean the theaters, and the lack of air. Or the darkness with rows of people staring straight ahead, lost in two-dimensional images. All these things make me feel sick. I get claustrophobic and usually have to leave."

"If you have to leave, Judith, then leave. But I want you to know my landscape. Besides, it's so great a film I hear, and I will stay even if you have to leave." She moves her chair back abruptly and heads for the cashier.

At the last documentary I saw, *Harlan County, USA*, I had to leave mid-way through. Maybe I just can't take violence in films and most contemporary films have violence in them,either implied or shown directly.

The film we are to see, *Allende's Chile*, was banned in Argentina by the military government. It documents the events leading up to Allende's murder and the overthrow of his Marxist-oriented

government.

"Why don't you get some fruit, Mari?" I suggest as we pass a nice-looking fruit stand on Bleecker Street. "I'll get the tickets and wait for you in the lobby. Peaches, bananas, pomegranates would be good," I call back to her. These are the fruits lovers might eat together. "And get some popcorn too. It's cheaper than in the theater."

I wonder if we'll hold hands.

The theater is very crowded and we have to take seats near the front.

After forty-five minutes of demonstrations, speeches, confrontation, an uneasy feeling begins in my stomach. At first I try to close my eyes and breathe deeply. I've never seen a film jump around so much. I am dizzy.

Mari is totally captivated. She is back home in South America. I try to curl up and close my eyes. The tight chair can't hold me and I keep knocking the person next to me. Each time I do, he says politely, "I'm sorry."

The uncomfortable feeling grows. I turn to Mari and grimace. "I've got to go out for a while. I'm feeling nauseated. If I don't come back, look for me out front." I run up the aisle stepping over people huddled there. At the swinging doors, I spy a metal stand for cigarette butts filled with sand. What a mess I could make in there. I must hold it in a little longer.

Out in the street my eyes light upon a small, cardboard box. It seems to be waiting there for me. I dip down, vomiting up peaches, popcorn, lemonade and lunch into it. Then I fly down the street into the moist night air. Later, I'll do something with the box.

Through a warm mist, heavy shapes appear, familiar but not compelling. They are the NYU apartment buildings which surround the nondescript Picasso head. I am drawn, however, to this closest sanctuary of grass and trees.

I find a tree, one of those brave skinny city characters, and nuzzle against it.

The moon is full of herself. The bright circle of light, like a shot of whiskey, brings me back quickly to myself. The violent

scenes have made me very tense. I take deep breaths to relax. Slowly my mind wakes up.

My politics are very simple. Place me next to a tree like this and I will debate with the moon. But I don't want to see another documentation of violence.

A smell invades my moon contemplation. I try to ignore it as I would an annoying fly, but it persists. I trace the smell to the grass underneath me. A chemical smell. Spray. They've sprayed everything here. Of course they would. These are expensive apartments and they have to kill the weeds. The dandelions, the chamomile, the lambs-quarters must go.

The smell brings back my nausea again. I'll walk back to the theater. I'll try again. She wants me to see this film with her. She'll only be here for two more weeks. I've got to try again.

I look for my box of vomit. I can't believe it's gone. Don't even attempt to guess what's happened to it. I enter the theater and find a place to kneel in the aisle in case I have to leave again. I see Mari to the right of me. Her face is directed fixedly at the screen.

I will always remember her like this, wearing worn jeans and the brown army shirt she wore to paint in when we worked on the paint crew. I had saved it—in case she returned.

She is Tanya, Julia, Emma, Simone. She is Mari. Her life has nothing and everything to do with mine. She is Mari. I am Judith. I am Judith who in the 60's worked full time in the anti-war movement. I am Judith who learned how to create with others. I am Judith who wants to be aware of the political struggles unfolding around the world. I am also Bird who transforms herself by chanting and singing. That is Mari whom I'll love and cherish and hold close to my heart, always.

I feel myself swaying back and forth on my haunches in the aisle of the theater and realize I have been murmuring a kind of prayer. Someone asks me to be quiet. I stand up. I have seen my film on Chile. I go to Mari and whisper that I have to go home. She is welcome to come over after the film if she wishes. She says she will see how she feels then. It seems right that she can choose to come or not to come.

She does come, and I have dinner waiting for her. We can't be that far out of touch. She tells me about the film. I enjoy her enthusiasms and her criticisms. We fall asleep beside each other on the couch and in the middle of the night when she reaches her arm out for mine I move toward her. She puts her arms around me and we fall asleep, holding each other and feeling close.

* * *

We spend our last weekend together in the country, not only for pleasure, but to work. On Saturday afternoon she reads her poetry and talks to a small group of fascinated villagers at Lynn Rutger's pleasant bookstore in a small New England college town. I give an evening concert for the students.

They hear her poems about childhood, traveling, impressions of America and her myths of the Indian people she knows. First I read her work in English and then she reads in Spanish. I am proud to be her friend, her co-worker. Those in the audience who know Spanish are especially enthralled by her work. The rest of us let cadences roll over us like healing ocean waves.

That night I sing with my marimba, the instrument I have carried with me since childhood, the instrument Meredith, my twin, and I once shared.

The evening's event takes place in a small dance studio. A potter from the area softened the space with her clay pots which were shapes of the female body. She planted a small tree with orange leaves in the center of the room.

Mari drifts in and out of the studio while I am setting up with Gazelle, my sound woman for the night. We set amplifiers on the opposite side of the room from the musical instruments. Music will surround the audience, instead of blast it. I place a mirror on the piano so that the audience can see my face as I do a couple numbers on that instrument. And to make a ceremonial atmosphere, I put candles on small round mirrors in an arc around me and the instruments. The masks which I hang in the space above me, enhance my music with their mysterious presences.

I hear Mari's poetry again chanting in me as I work. I decide I will sing my song for her, one last time. I want to make her una-

voidable leave-taking bearable by sharing the song with others.

Mari doesn't take her eyes off of me that night. I feel her almost loving me again, wanting to hold me, embrace me, touch me, make love with me. She cries when I sing her song. Orange leaves waft about as I play; the leaves seem to respond to a primal energy.

Afterwards at Tony's house where we are staying—she and her husband have organized our two events—we socialize with a small group of admirers.

Skip, a tall woman with a bandana, tells us about the phenomenal amount of UFO's in the area. For days her dog, an excellent hunter, barked every night, pointing towards the same spot, a clump of pine trees 50 yards from Skip's small farmhouse. Yet whenever Skip searched this area, she could find nothing. One morning when she investigated carefully, she found a burnt place on the ground. Looking up she saw that all of the branches directly above this spot were burnt and broken off. The spot felt electric to her, filled with an intense energy. She was sure a UFO had landed there.

We ask her if she was frightened and she says, "You bet I was. I still am."

I suggest to her that perhaps some part of sky lab has fallen there.

"Wouldn't you have seen a piece of metal, something that had caused the burning place?" Tony askes Skip. Like the rest of us she is fascinated and alarmed.

"Maybe it was some combustible vapor like gas," Skip replies.

Mari's eyes are as large as mine. "Don't make sense, because how would the gas not have dispersed long before it landed there."

"I know it doesn't make sense, but what does, when it comes to the U.S. arms race," I say.

Skip leaps towards us. She looks first at Mari and then at me with a look of one about to explode. "They harm their own citzens with their war games. I swear, I think they're on a suicide trip, a mass suicide trip. If you think Guyana was abominable,

this holocaust being played with is beyond comprehension."

Skip says, "Mari and Judith, you don't know how I needed you today. I was feeling so negative, so lost. You know that they are trying to build a nuclear power plant only five miles from this town? Many of us are here to get back to the land—we grow vegetables and raise goats. We are organizing to stop them. But I'm depressed all the time. If only I had the strength to..." She breaks off as if to hold back an uncontrollable anguish, then sinks into a large easy chair with a great sigh.

Jill, a smallish woman, puts her arm around Skip as she speaks. "We're all being affected by this race for nuclear power. Have you noticed how many articles recently are trying to imply that the 'real' Americans are for it, for nuclear everything. They pooh-pooh the fact that the scientists admit there are not adequate storage facilities for the waste products already existing. Nuclear waste products last for thousands of years longer than any storage containers that can be built to hold them."

Shira, who sits in the far corner of the candle-lit room on the edge of a stool, drums rapidly on a conga drum. She begins to talk as she plays.

"Judith, you really should have the subject of nuclear disarmament be part of your concerts," she says in a syncopated rhythm with the drum beats. "Maybe someone could give a speech. We've got to stop the production of any more plutonium and develop safe ways of storing the waste materials already produced. A whole culture has to be developed around taking care of these lethal products."

"How can we do that?" I ask.

"A portion of the world could be set aside to be used only for storage. Each succeeding generation of people would be responsible to build new waste containers as the old ones deteriorate. You know, our earth has a phenomenal power to heal itself, with our help!" She ends her comment with a short rendition of a new song by the Earth Sisters—'Three Mile Island is in your own Back Yard.'

When she stops the song abruptly, I call out to her, "Shira, I would like to talk more with you about this. Mari and I are stay-

ing here for a couple of more days. Tomorrow we are hiking in the woods near Lake Tuckahoe. But on Monday I'm free. Could you meet with me then?"

"Sure, and I'll get other women to come too. We've been talking about organizing a women's speak-out against nuclear power. We could travel around the country, spreading information on alternative possibilities."Shira spins off her stool and joins us.

I see her face clearly for the first time. It has a serious clown look. She continues drumming nervously on her knees as she sits in a straight-backed lotus position beside Mari. She looks ready to spring into action at a moment's notice.

We were exhausted by the time we went to sleep that night. There was always more and more work to be done. Shira was right. I should engage the audience in a discussion on how we can save our planet.

I fell asleep forgetting for once to worry about whether Mari and I would ever be lovers again. We had work to do. I fell asleep hugging her, realizing my immediate need for a companion paled within the larger struggle—survival of my world. It didn't matter where she lived. That she live was all that mattered.

The next day we took time to search out a spot in the woods that suited us both. I could almost smell the orange and red leaves under our feet. She skipped across them and they seemed to leap and somersault everywhere.

She wanted a cave-like place where she could rest and I wanted a hill-crest where I could watch out for intruders. When we tired of walking we worked out a compromise without much fuss.

She lay down several yards from me and buried herself in the leaves. I fought off a huge desire to leap on her and cover us with a blanket of color. She needed space. We could be alone and together at the same time. I rested against a birch tree on a wave of earth above her.

I thought of my mother then and realized that ever since I had

stopped caring so much if she understood me or not, I could actually keep tender, generous thoughts for her. Like Mari, she was her own person with her own needs, limitations and frustrations. Yet I knew that I would always feel wounded by her inability to embrace me more fully. I had told her nothing about my relationships since my separation from Josh except that I was living alone. And she didn't ask. I was not the source of her happiness or unhappiness. She had to work that out for herself. I promised myself that if she tried to manipulate me again, I would call her on it. I would say, "If you want to know who I am you have to work at it. You have to want to listen to me, to know me."

Tension from yesterday's work left my body. I felt more inside myself than I had for a long time. I lost sight of Mari and began breathing deeply. How thankful I felt to be in the woods. With her, without her, it was good to be alive.

A sweet inner voice spoke: *When you are alone, enjoy that. When you are with another, enjoy that.*

I rested deeper into the earth, the birch trees, the sky. Mari had once told me, "Let the life to flow." That was happening. The life was flowing.

You are doing your work and she is doing hers, my voice continued. *You have had a great gift to see each other again.*

Wet leaves, a squirrel, puff balls, spider webs appeared magically before me. I felt that Bird was addressing Judith. *There is so much to be seen, enjoyed. Allow life to happen, little one. Be good to yourself. Be kind. After all, you will always be with you, while others will come and go.*

I started chanting, "Hold close tightly and let go lightly," when I heard someone whistling. It was Mari.

Leaves fell everywhere around me. I rolled in gold, yellow, brown, orange, red leaves and Mari rolled over me, around me, under me. She brushed the leaves from my hair.

"I was having a strange dream, Judith. I dreamt an old brown woman, but she didn't seem old, picked me up and carried me to my little cabin on the Parana and all my dogs came up to me and were licking me. I dreamt she took me home. I miss it so, my own home. So I come to wake you up because I felt lonely."

She curled up beside me and put her head on my shoulder. Momentarily I felt dampness on my skin by her head. She was crying. "Oh, Judith, don't you see why I can't to be in love with you again? Why I can't be in love with your dirty city? It would kill me to stay here. I know I could find a way to break the visa if I had to. But now I know for sure my home is Argentina. I had to travel over continents, back and forth over oceans before to find out my home is my home. My new-old roots grow there. And I have something so important to tell you. Something you in your wisdom would already know would be. I have become a true deep lover with someone you know."

"Don't tell me that wild woman poet from the bookstore in Paris showed up at your door in Buenos Aires?"

Mari laughed almost giddily, deeply, freely. There were no signs of the forced glee she had when I first knew her.

"Who, sweetheart? Tell me."

"I became my own best lover as you taught me. The kindest gift you could ever give me."

She seemed to be blushing, but then the sun was lighting up her face in the most compelling way.

"Oh, Mari,"...my voice broke. She caught me as I fell towards her. I felt the rhythm of her breathing as we embraced.

* * *

"Here, I want give you something." Mari's fist is close around some small object. The unmistakeable smell of turpentine tickles my nose.

"Oh, I love that smell. I always see huge paintings with brilliant shapes done in primary colors when I smell it. A feast for the eyes."

She reveals her object, slowly moving it away from my face so that I can see it more clearly. Two pine cones are joined at their tops, making a V shape between them.

"Oh, poor things," I say. "Where did you find them?"

"Under the brown leaves over there." She points to the spot where she had rested. "Seem so dear to me, like the two in the one. Like I feel I'll always long to be so I won't be alone."

"Then I'll take it as a reminder of you, Mari. I get a funny feeling just looking at this twosome. That's what I have struggled to get away from."

"I wanted to ask you again about your sister."

"Didn't I tell you that she came to see me just before you came back? I was shocked to see her. It was like she dropped out of the sky. In some ways I feel like she's the part of me I left behind at some crossroads. I might have lived her life except for a quirk in nature that sent me on another path. I wonder if she feels the same about me. I wonder if Meredith ever thinks, I mean even for just a second, about being with a woman. Maybe she does and that's why I'm scary for her."

"People can have all kinds of thoughts in their head at one time, Judith, but the key is which ones we act on."

"That's just it. A primary need for her is to be attractive to and close to men. A primary need for me is to feel attractive to and connected to a woman. Maybe I inherited something from my mother's genes that makes me need to lie with women. Who knows. I don't think my being a lesbian has anything to do with being a twin or empathizing with my mother when I was little. I know one set of twins, women, who are both straight as arrows. And I know other twins who are both gay. Thank god no one will ever figure this out. But I can just imagine that one day a scientist is going to point out someone's chromosome and say, 'See that blue dot. We found one of those in seven out of every ten lesbians.' "

"That seem horrible. You can analyse this thing the backwards and forwards and still no one know. Did you ever think that maybe there is an unconscious force in us to give back to women what seem they aren't getting from the men?"

"You mean we're keeping an ecological balance in the world by nourishing other women because so many are really underfed emotionally?"

"Si. For example, I see so much that it is the women and the lesbians who take care for the elderly, the handicapped and also are so concerned for the environment. In some ways they are the protectors of all life. Women are so much the force to stop

the madness. I speak you about the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo didn't I?"

"The relatives and mothers of the missing young people from the Junta? Yes, I saw a news coverage about them the other day. The commentator say they are doing more in their silent vigil each day to help stop the kidnappings and murders of the young politicos than any other factor."

"It is like when women group together with common cause that the gods bow down before them."

"Mari, how can we not love other strong, caring women, intelligent women. If people were allowed to love freely there just would be more same sex loving in the world."

"Love is touch. Touch is know. But Judith, don't you think you make your path to happen?"

"Sure, I use a scythe to cut my way through the woods. But there are times I feel like life lives me; I'm not always in charge."

"I know what means. So we got off our path too. You were to tell me about what you tell Meredith."

"I tried to talk to her. She noticed your pictures. She was drawn to the exotic woman I had on my wall. She began to ask questions and then when I tried to talk to her, she cut herself off from me. So I tried to talk more generally about myself so she wouldn't feel threatened by a particular person. But I was chicken. I couldn't bring myself to use the big L word."

"You mean *love*?"

"I mean *lesbian*."

"I said I slept with women, I loved women. She said there's a word for that, but she didn't want to hear it and that it was disgusting, but that I wasn't disgusting. You know the typical things that all liberal homophobes say."

"That doesn't sound liberal to me. Sound closed-minded. I'm sorry, Judith. I feel sad that you can't to speak freely with anyone in your family about your essential you. Families are so the cruel to each other."

"It's funny, but even when I was very young I remember thinking, knowing, that friends were going to help me survive more than family. And yet I'm always crying that I don't have a

traditional family like other people."

"It seem you have trouble accepting yourself as much as Meredith have trouble accepting you. Maybe she smells your fear like animals do and maybe she is afraid for you."

"That upsets me, Mari." I reach out for the hand she is offering me.

"She probably thinks its very lonely for you. That you don't have a husband and kids like her. Didn't you tell me she has two boys?"

"Yes. She has a Mari too and a Sal. Mari is short for Mario. Isn't that a coincidence?"

"See, Judith, you can't to escape your connection. You know, I bet I would love her just as much as you."

"But Mari, she isn't at all like me."

"I have a feeling she is both more like you and more different than you can see. That's so beautiful. But you're afraid for that. Do you know your voice change when you talk about her? It's so mysterious thing for me."

"Like how?"

"You always look at me in a funny way, from the side—careful, maybe, guarded. Then you talk softer, more slow and measured."

"I'm still afraid people won't like me so much if they know I'm a twin. But isn't that crazy. I'm still that little kid that wanted her own friends."

"I think is a so beautiful reality to have a sister as close to you."

"And yet so far." I see myself hovering over Mari for warmth, for assurance.

"I told you how much it has made me feel to belong since I know my sister Claudia again in Argentina. She was so young when I first left there. Now we can share together. I stay with her some times at the Universidad where she go. I retrace my travels for her and I see them so much better now telling her and feel her perspective. Probably because she came from same place she can see more clear than me. Maybe there is too much hurt at other times how I can to have left her. She wear my bone

stone, you know the one I always kept for good luck, around her ankle. So sweet. She knows just what she want, a good job. She study to be an engineer. She doesn't have that terrible need to know everything that I have, but she is so good reality check for me. She keep me focused in some way because she doesn't have that awe for me like people here have."

"That sounds almost too healthy!"

"I can tell her the little vulnerable things about me."

"Like what?"

"Like what I can't tell the people here."

"Like me?"

"Things that keep me so much like all the people."

"Okay, you can have some secrets. I won't pry. Sometimes I think if I get too healthy I wont be lovers with anyone. Isn't that crazy? Isn't sex healthy?"

"You'll find another healthy woman. And you should be proud to be twin, Judith."

"That's what Meredith says too."

"Maybe if you could be more relax about having a twin could help you be more relax about loving women. Maybe you could have been more relax about loving me when I was with you instead of when I was away from you. When it was so much the safer. Promet me something." She strokes my hair in a tender way

"What?"

"Promet me that your next lover you will embrace fully and you will take her to meet Meredith. If she love Meredith, Meredith will accept her and you. Love makes love. It's just when people feel they are losing love that they get so tight and critical."

"Here, Mari, let me hold the pine cone."

She retrieves our treasure from her shirt pocket where I'd put it. I hold it for a few moments then put it in my shirt pocket.

"I want to say something." I close my eyes and hold both her hands tightly with mine.

"The two in the one, the two in the one. You are the moon. You are the sun. You were my lover, you are my friend. And in that way our love won't end."

"So the beautiful, Judith."

"Wait I'm not done. My poems always come in pairs. Ready? The one in the two, the one in the two. I can be me and you can be you. I like red and you like blue. Together we make a purple hue."

"My one in the two, I bet the Mama had plenty envidia of you two."

"Envious? That's what I've been trying to tell you. People do get jealous when they see two of any kind of people together and they feel alone. I don't want other people to feel left out. I was caught between my mother and my sister. I didn't want either of them to feel left out. I couldn't stand it when Josh felt left out from my love for you either."

"Hokay, I get you. But you have to be you."

"Oh, Mari, I want to fill out my shape better, walk more solid on this earth. Not have unnecessary suffering for others. Is that possible when there is so much suffering?"

"Your shape look good to me, mi pájarita."

Her hands on my face, my shoulders, my arms, feel so comforting.

"You have to feel good to do good, Judith. You helped me with that."

"You know, my South American woman, that's how you have helped me. Your courage to be you, to take your road regardless of how other people have tried to stop you. That's the gift you have given me. But I accept the pine cone too, my two face Mari, my North American, my South American Mari. You have given me courage to embrace my different parts. God, have you helped me. Yes, I can think of it as the one in the two and the two in the one."

"You know, Judith. I just have this feeling in me that soon Meredith will be able to hear you better. She did come to see you. She did begin to ask you about me. And sometime a change in our life, could even be something terrible tragic like a death or sickness, that open us up to more understanding. That happen to me when my close beloved Margarita die. I learned not to be afraid to love, to not be afraid to feel my love and let it

take me where it lead me. Maybe that too could happen to Meredith. She could see how important it is to love you no matter what."

I feel a sharp pain in my chest—who is it for?

"Come here, my beauty. I see the tears in your eyes."

"It's not so much that I miss Meredith as much as I miss what we don't have. More acceptance. It's so hard to keep trying. I just don't know how we all keep trying."

"You have to allow your feelings, Judith. It's hokay whatever you feel. Come on to cry with me. Go with your fears."

I buried my head in Mari's chest and sobbed heavily. She kept stroking my hair, easing me slowly into a calm place.

"Mari, I needed that so bad."

"I can cry with you, too. Here, Pájarita, a kleenex. Now blow your nose."

"Could we just say a prayer now with mother nature? I want everyone we love to be here with us."

We sat cross-legged, facing each other and named all those close to us. I felt again how two together can give birth to so much love. I felt the others sitting in a much larger circle arounc us, rocking to the rhythm of our naming; they were smiling. We were all part of a smiling circle of love.

After a long silence I opened my eyes. I felt I had landed on the earth again. Mari—sitting in front of me—seemed almost unapproachable, sacred. I wondered if my presence felt as strong to her as hers did to me. I felt I was emerging from the last throes of a trance. Everything around me seemed to slow down from a trembling motion into a solid, real, still place. I was really here and Mari was really with me.

I felt my mind had been cleared of fantasies and anxious yearnings. Still, I knew that if she had said to me, "I am in love with you again," my passionate feelings would have surfaced towards her. I loved her deeply, completely. Yet, I was poised to both hold her close and let her go lightly. This is what I would have to do—hold her close in memory, let her go in reality.

"Mari." I brushed an orange leaf from her blouse. "Do you

want to hear an amazing coincidence? Last week I had a dream that an old woman asked me to walk with her to a cabin hidden in the woods. But for some reason which isn't clear to me yet, I couldn't go with her. I was supposed to do something first. What did your brown lady look like?"

"Her eyes poked through a thousand wrinkles. She wore a huipil, a cloak of many colors, and she carried a backpack like mine."

"Mine had a brown cloak and a purple velvet skirt and breasts kind of like mine."

"It's obvious that your lady and mine weren't the same person, Judith."

"No, but they could have been sisters," I laughed.

"Like you and me, Judith."

"Like you and me, Mari."

* * *

On Monday night before she left, we sat a long time in the Chinese restaurant on the corner of Broadway and 94th Street. The waiter brought fortune cookies and we opened them at the same time.

"What does yours say?" she asked me first.

"Mine says, *A good deed eases the heart.* "

"But that's exactly what mine says," Mari says. This has never happened to either of us before.

That was the night I brought all of her photographs to return to her. I also brought the butterfly ring that Margaret had made. It was wrapped in silver foil because I had no wrapping paper. She took the butterfly ring, but she would not take the photographs.

We looked at them together and we both tried not to cry. That was the last night I saw her. She put the mariposa ring on her finger. Mariposa was the first Spanish word she had ever spoken to me.

* * *

Today I think of the women I am close to. I will see Chloe next Sunday. She is raising three children alone. I could use

some kids in my life and Chloe could use some help. Jessie returns from a women's music festival on Friday. When she tells me she loves me I hear a simple melody played by a flute. The song relaxes me. I don't feel I have to perform any magic tricks for her.

Maybe I have finally learned something about loving more easefully. I want to let joy and responsibility blend into a happy pair. I surely know something more about how our souls in their loneliness will invent all kinds of connections in hopes of sustaining that oneness which seems so terrifying, so impossible to achieve.

I think our best lovers remind us of our own potential and complexity. They serve as splendid models of the yet unborn twin, triplets we have tucked inside us. I know I see my various selves mirrored in the faces of those I am drawn to. But it's sad when twins, just like other twosomes, become puppets of simplistic views and rules. We are easy prey to glib fables about opposites. My struggle is to become as whole a person as I can, not to fit neatly on the other side of someone's coin.

You know, one could do worse than hook up with a twin. Though we have an innate tendency toward *twinning*—we tend to blindly embrace those we are fond of with our psychic arms and in the process lose sight of necessary boundaries—we are naturally disposed to consider the other person as much as ourself.

Querida Mari touched ground again in her green land months ago. She has the empathetic heart and soul of a twin. Though I couldn't always talk to her the way I had imagined, though I couldn't always find the words needed to make a bridge, not between her country and mine, but between her and me, though I couldn't bear to go to the airport with her this last time around, I know this concentration of words held her aloft as she flew back to Argentina. These sentences helped her past the custom officials and the military who questioned her and asked to see her identification papers. These paragraphs guided her up the river to her little cabin. And these pages helped me discover that I can be without her in my bed, without her at the dinner table,

without her walking down the street at my side. I can enjoy a cup of coffee without her joining me.

Now when I miss her, I have this document to remind me how much we have shared. I hope this attempt to write my story well inspires at least one other person to tell theirs. I wanted to say *our* story but Mari has her own story to write. Maybe I'll call up Sarah Schoen and ask her if she'd like to read it.

I wish I had the courage to show the manuscript to Meredith. Would she think I turned her into a caricature? I'd have to change the point of view, make it more objective as Josh always told me to do. Then I'd have to change everyone's names. Where would I say Meredith and I were from? But then it wouldn't be Meredith and Judith anymore. And can you imagine turning Mari into a Mario so that Meredith would be more comfortable? Everyone would be wearing masks. That would be someone else's story. That would not be my story.

* * *

20 de enero, from my little house

Dearest one, my friend, Judith. I'm back here again after the so beautiful time in your country and the so splintered time with you. But it was like the miracles that follow us through all our life that our last days together had the depth of feeling that were in our first days but with the recognition of the reality of our lives. I won't be back to your country for a long time. Possible never.

I'm here to live a great love.Working and learning and dreaming with my feet over the sea. You would love this land and her people as much as I love them and some day you will to come here and walk the roads with me. Joy and hope come back to my eyes and they come from the people living a strong life in the middle of them tragedy and misery.

Judith, strange, but now, only now, I discover myself being like you, or being you, or feeling the same that you feel. Tonight singing a long song I improvised about moving through the sky with my small fire horse, running over the earth, out of time like a child like almost non human. I feel by first time I really know

you, so then by first time I really love you. It helped me so much to hear you say that only when I was away from you could you say to me that you were in love with me. From the distance I have now it seem we know all along that we could not to live with each other at these times, so that in some way we were both trying to take care for each other and for our self.

Today I really finished ***Zorra's Book****. I gave it to the publishers. It's so warm here. I have put away the white wool hat that you gave me in New York but I wear the butterfly ring all the times.*

Tell Josh maybe I began to become really a poet, but I would like to say you that maybe I'm really becoming political, a revolutionary. But, I want to live for my people now, not to die for them.

The sun raise over the earth for all of us. I pray to Pachamma Tonantzin Tiamat for you and pray for one day when you will be able to travel to me, the day that it will be right for you to come here.

Please write to me the little things of your life when you can.

Chou, Mari

photo by Rain Bengis

Jeriann Hilderley studied at Smith College, University of California, and obtained the MA degree of Art from the University of Michigan. Her sculpture shows were part of the reawakening of women's symbols and imagery in the mid 1960s. She was founder and a director, actor, musician in the collective groups, *Burning City Street Theater,* and *Women's Ritual Theater*, both based in New York City from 1968 to 1972. She has performed her music, recorded on *Sea Wave Records*, throughout the U.S. and Canada. Her poetry, plays and analytical writings on theater, group dynamics, music and ritual have appeared in such publications as *Chicago Review, Heresies, People's Theater in America, Woman Spirit,* street theater anthologies and music journals. Reviews of her work have appeared in the *Village Voice, Ms.* magazine and the *Guardian.* She has taught at the University of Michigan, the Henry Street Settlement, SUNY Purchase, and has given resident workshops in creative music and theater at several colleges. She is licensed as a Music Educator-Therapist in Special Education, and presently works in the New York City public schools. She has been part of many movements and wishes to write and sing about what she has learned.

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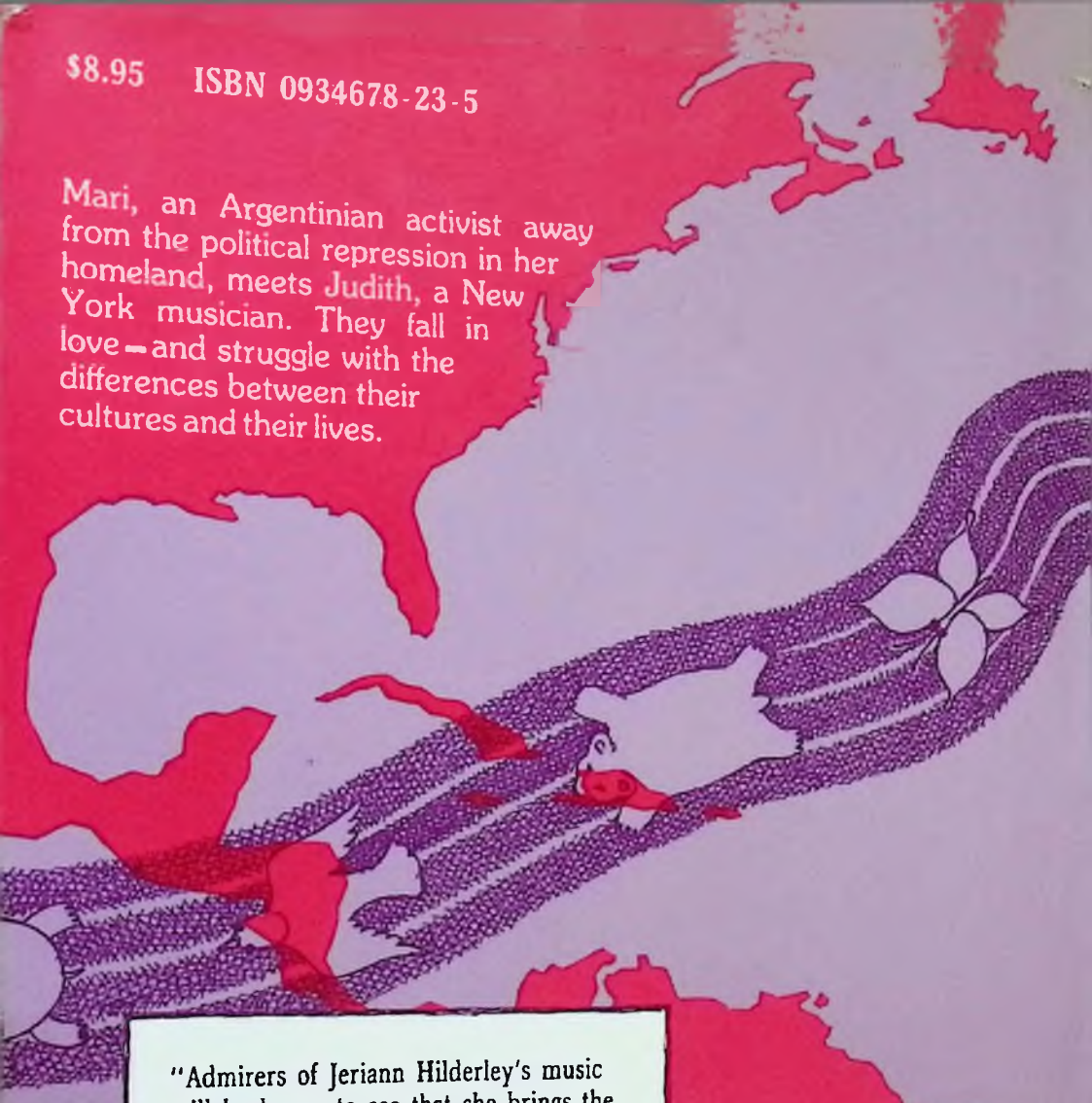

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